

= Frank Bladin =

Air Vice Marshal Francis Masson ( Frank ) Bladin , CB , CBE ( 26 August 1898 ? 2 February 1978 ) was a senior commander in the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) . Born in rural Victoria , he graduated from the Royal Military College , Duntroon , in 1920 . Bladin transferred from the Army to the Air Force in 1923 , and learned to fly at RAAF Point Cook , Victoria . He held training appointments before taking command of No. 1 Squadron in 1934 . Quiet but authoritative , he was nicknamed " Dad " in tribute to the concern he displayed for the welfare of his personnel .

Ranked wing commander at the outbreak of World War II , by September 1941 Bladin had been raised to temporary air commodore . He became Air Officer Commanding North @-@ Western Area in March 1942 , following the first Japanese air raids on Darwin , Northern Territory . Personally leading sorties against enemy territory , he earned the United States Silver Star for gallantry . In July 1943 , Bladin was posted to No. 38 Group RAF in Europe , where he was mentioned in despatches . He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire the same year .

Promoted acting air vice marshal in 1946 , Bladin was among the coterie of senior officers who helped reshape the post @-@ war RAAF . His roles in the late 1940s and early 1950s included Chief of Staff of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan , Air Officer Commanding Eastern Area ( later RAAF Air Command ) , and Air Member for Personnel . Appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath in 1950 , he retired to his country property in 1953 . He was active for many years in veterans ' affairs before his death in 1978 at the age of seventy @-@ nine .

= = Early career = =

Frank Bladin was born on 26 August 1898 in Korumburra , Victoria , the youngest son of engineer Frederick Bladin and his wife Ellen . Educated to junior public level at Melbourne High School , he sought to join the Australian Imperial Force during World War I. His parents refused their permission , and he instead entered the Royal Military College , Duntroon , in 1917 . Graduating in 1920 , Bladin served for the next two years in the Australian Army , including sixteen months seconded to the Royal Field Artillery in Britain . He transferred to the recently established Royal Australian Air Force as a flying officer in January 1923 . Undergoing pilot training at Point Cook , Victoria , he was one of five former Army lieutenants on the inaugural RAAF flying course ? all of whom had left their original service at least partly because of poor career prospects in the post @-@ war military . One of Bladin 's other classmates on the course was a 1919 graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College , Sub @-@ Lieutenant Joe Hewitt . During 1925 ? 26 , Bladin was in charge of running Citizens Air Force ( reserve ) pilots ' courses at No. 1 Flying Training School , Point Cook . Having been promoted to flight lieutenant , he married Patricia Magennis at Yass , New South Wales , on 20 December 1927 ; the couple had a son and two daughters .

Bladin was posted to Britain in 1929 to attend RAF Staff College , Andover , and wrote an article on Empire air defence in 1931 for Royal Air Force Quarterly , one of the few published pieces of work on air power produced by RAAF officers in the pre @-@ war years . Promoted to squadron leader , he took over as Commanding Officer of No. 1 Squadron from Squadron Leader Frank Lukis in April 1934 . Bladin found that the unit , flying Westland Wapitis and Hawker Demons out of RAAF Station Laverton in Victoria , " had not operated under field conditions away from its brick hangars and concrete tarmac since its inception some eight years previous " . He proceeded to change this , deploying the squadron 300 miles away to Cootamundra in rural New South Wales , where he " borrowed a portion of a sheep station from a friend so that the pilots could carry out their bombing practice " over a two @-@ week period commencing in late November 1935 . After completing his tenure with No. 1 Squadron in December , Bladin was appointed Officer Commanding Cadet Squadron at No. 1 Flying Training School . He modelled the training course on that of Duntroon , foreshadowing instruction at the Air Force 's own cadet institute , RAAF College , which would be established in 1947 . On 12 March 1937 , he was promoted to wing commander .

= = World War II = =

Bladin 's first posting following the outbreak of World War II was as Director of Operations and Intelligence at RAAF Headquarters , Melbourne , in March 1940 . Promoted to group captain in June , he became Air Officer Commanding Southern Area in August 1941 and was raised to acting air commodore the following month . By 1 January 1942 , Bladin was serving as Assistant Chief of the Air Staff ( Operations ) , charged with readying air bases and putting into effect plans for the Empire Air Training Scheme . He took over as Air Officer Commanding North @-@ Western Area ( AOC NWA ) on 25 March that year . Based in Darwin , his role was to conduct the air defence of Torres Strait , the Northern Territory , and north Western Australia . He also had to restore morale following the bombing of Darwin on 19 February and deal with the threat of imminent invasion , tasks complicated by the poor state of local communications , transport and early warning systems . Initiating combat training for all RAAF ground crew , Bladin proceeded to construct secondary airfields so that he could disperse his forces . He became , in the words of Air Force historian Dr Alan Stephens , " the RAAF 's outstanding area commander of the war " , and earned distinction as the first Australian decorated by the United States in the Pacific theatre of operations when he was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry . The cited action took place in June when Bladin personally led a raid by USAAF B @-@ 17 Flying Fortresses on Celebes in the Dutch East Indies . As well as destroying enemy machines on the ground and damaging infrastructure , the Allied bombers managed to evade an attack by nine Japanese fighters during their return to base . Bladin 's award was recommended in September , and promulgated in the Australian Gazette on 23 November 1944 .

By December 1942 , Bladin 's strength in NWA consisted of seven RAAF squadrons operating mainly Bristol Beaufighter and P @-@ 40 Kittyhawk fighters , Lockheed Hudson light bombers , and A @-@ 31 Vengeance dive bombers . These were soon augmented by one squadron each of Dutch East Indies B @-@ 25 Mitchell medium bombers and USAAF B @-@ 24 Liberator heavy bombers . As Japanese air raids continued into 1943 , Bladin placed his bombers inland , and his fighters close to the coast where they could intercept the raiders . Appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 1 January 1943 , he stepped up offensive strikes against island bases and shipping in the Timor and Arafura Seas as the Allies took the fight to the Japanese . He often employed his own judgement in the selection of targets , as detailed directives from superior headquarters were not always forthcoming . On 27 February , acting on intercepted radio transmissions , he launched a pre @-@ emptive raid on Penfui airfield near Koepang , which destroyed or damaged twenty @-@ two enemy bombers that had been destined to make a major raid on Darwin . To help protect northern Australia from ongoing air attack , three squadrons of Spitfire fighters were transferred from the United Kingdom in late 1942 , becoming operational in March 1943 as No. 1 Fighter Wing . A major engagement over Darwin on 2 May resulted in eight Spitfires crashing and several others making forced landings , for the destruction of one Japanese bomber and five fighters . An adverse communiqué concerning the action was issued from General Douglas MacArthur 's headquarters and was picked up by Australian newspapers , which reported the Spitfires ' " heavy losses " and caused resentment in NWA . Bladin complained to his superior , Air Vice Marshal Bill Bostock , that the " alarmist tendency of the press and radio references was having a bad effect on the combat pilots " . He also ordered an immediate Beaufighter strike led by Wing Commander Charles Read against Penfui airfield , on the assumption that this was where the Japanese raiders were based ; four enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground .

On 17 June , under the command of Group Captain Clive Caldwell , No. 1 Fighter Wing recorded NWA 's most successful interception to date , claiming fourteen Japanese raiders destroyed and ten damaged , for the loss of two Spitfires . The 380th Bombardment Group USAAF , consisting of four squadrons of Liberators , came under Bladin 's control the same month , enhancing NWA 's strategic strike capability . When Bladin handed over North @-@ Western Area to Air Vice Marshal Adrian Cole in July 1943 , the latter reported that his new command was " well organised , keen and in good shape " . Posted to England as Senior Air Staff Officer ( SASO ) of No. 38 Group RAF , Bladin was closely involved in training aircrew and planning airborne operations for Operation Overlord , the Allied invasion of France . He flew a mission on D @-@ Day , 6 June 1944 , to deliver

glider @-@ borne troops to Normandy , and was mentioned in despatches two days later . Completing his RAF service on the staff of the Second Tactical Air Force in France , Bladin returned to Australia to become Deputy Chief of the Air Staff in October 1944 . On two occasions in June 1945 , he was considered for the position of AOC RAAF Command , the Air Force 's main operational formation in the South West Pacific . Bladin would have replaced Air Vice Marshal Bostock , who was facing disciplinary action for refusing to comply with directives from the Air Board , the RAAF 's controlling body , but in the end the Australian government made no change to command arrangements .

= = Post @-@ war career = =

The RAF had planned to deploy an airborne formation , No. 238 ( Airborne Assault ) Group , to the Pacific theatre and requested Bladin be released from his duties as Deputy Chief of the Air Staff to assume its command , but this was cancelled with the end of hostilities in August 1945 . His next posting was to Kure , Japan , in January 1946 , as Chief of Staff to Lieutenant General John Northcott , commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force ( BCOF ) . Northcott reportedly chose Bladin not only for his operational command and staff experience in the RAAF and the RAF during World War II , but for his pedigree as a Duntroon graduate rather than having a background that was confined to the Air Force alone . Promoted acting air vice marshal on 1 March 1946 , he handed over to another Duntroon graduate , Air Vice Marshal John McCauley , in June 1947 . After returning to Australia , Bladin was to figure prominently , along with such figures as McCauley , Air Vice Marshal Joe Hewitt and Air Commodore ( later Air Chief Marshal Sir ) Frederick Scherger , in reshaping the post @-@ war Air Force . His next command was Eastern Area , which would evolve over the years into Home Command , Operational Command and , finally , Air Command . Bladin 's acting rank of air vice marshal was made substantive on 1 October 1948 . As AOC Eastern Area , he was instrumental in organising acquisition of a new site for his then @-@ headquarters at Bradfield Park on Sydney 's North Shore , namely the former Lapstone Hotel at Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains . Subsequently known as Headquarters Operational Command , later Headquarters Air Command , the site was purchased in mid @-@ 1949 , and became operational at the end of the year . As well as commanding a view of the surrounding countryside , the property was within five kilometres of the City of Penrith and thirty kilometres of RAAF Base Richmond , and incorporated a disused railway tunnel that offered " complete protection from Atom Bomb attack " .

Bladin became Air Member for Personnel ( AMP ) on 24 November 1948 ; this position gave him a seat on the Air Board , which consisted of the RAAF 's most senior officers and was chaired by the Chief of the Air Staff . He succeeded Joe Hewitt , and worked to consolidate the innovations in Air Force education and training that the latter had initiated . RAAF Staff College was opened in June 1949 at Point Cook , providing an advanced defence course aimed at squadron leaders and wing commanders ; various international facilities were also utilised to further officers ' education . In October , Bladin became involved in the push for a Junior Equipment and Administrative Training Scheme to offer apprenticeships to clerical and supply staff , which was established two years later . He was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath in the King 's Birthday Honours announced in June 1950 . In 1951 , inspired by a similar initiative in state education , he sponsored a move to have RAAF education officers augment their degree qualifications with formal teaching credentials . Over the following year , in response to increased demands for aircrew to meet Australia 's commitments to the Malayan Emergency and the Korean War , pilot training was broken out from a single all @-@ encompassing course at No. 1 Flying Training School ( No. 1 FTS ) in Point Cook , Victoria , into separate courses at the newly formed No. 1 Initial Flying Training School at Archerfield , Queensland , No. 1 Basic Flying Training School at Uranquinty , New South Wales , and No. 1 Applied Flying Training School ( re @-@ formed from No. 1 FTS ) at Point Cook .

= = Later life = =

Bladin retired from the Air Force on 15 October 1953 , and was succeeded as AMP by Air Vice Marshal Val Hancock . Shortly after leaving the Air Force , Bladin donated an eponymous trophy for the service 's best @-@ performing Avro Lincoln unit in bombing and aerial gunnery competition . He ran a grazing property , which he named Adastra , at Yass , just north of the Australian Capital Territory . Between 1951 and 1954 , and again from 1956 to 1969 , he also served as treasurer of the Returned Sailors ' , Soldiers ' and Airmen 's Imperial League of Australia , which became the Returned Services League in 1965 . In the early 1960s he helped raise funds for building the Anzac Memorial Chapel of St Paul at his old college , Duntroon . Bladin died in Melbourne on 2 February 1978 , survived by his three children . His wife , who was involved in the support of veterans ' families and other community work , had died earlier . Accorded an Air Force funeral at the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Deepdene , Frank Bladin was buried at Springvale , Victoria .