

## OBITUARY:

### *Squadron Leader W. W. (Bill) McRae, DFC, AFC*

William Wallace (Bill) McRae, an Honorary Life Member who had joined the Institute in 1951, was born near Lismore, New South Wales, on 14 January 1913 and died in Sydney on 31 May 2019 aged 106 years.

When World War II broke out in 1939, Bill, then 26-years-old, was serving with the Bank of New South Wales in London. He immediately enlisted in the British army and, after officer training, was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Artillery. He was posted to an anti-aircraft unit and thence to the Royal Air Force as an army artillery observer.

In 1940, he transferred to the Royal Air Force, underwent pilot training, and, after posting to the Desert Air Force in Egypt in 1941, became a Wellington bomber pilot. During the Allied campaign to drive Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps from north Africa, Bill and his crew in 1942 bombed key enemy infrastructure in rear areas and flew close air support missions



Bill McRae (centre) with his Wellington crew during World War II  
[Source: Bill McRae].

over Egypt and Libya from a base near Cairo. Many missions were flown at night, as the Wellingtons were equipped with sophisticated radar equipment. In 1943, now based in Malta, they flew bombing missions over German-occupied Tunisia and Libya. In all, they flew 43 missions, surviving some close calls, despite sustaining battle damage. Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for gallantry during a successful attack on an enemy transport and concentration area in December 1942.

Bill returned to Britain in late 1943. He spent the rest of the war training French aircrews in northern Scotland for missions over Germany. At war's end, he was awarded the Air Force Cross for "displaying great keenness in instructional duties".

After the war, he resumed work at the Bank of New South Wales in London. In 1947, he and his wife and daughter returned to Australia. He continued to serve with the bank in Sydney and Brisbane in various roles, but primarily as an accountant, before eventually retiring in Sydney in 1969 aged 56.

In 2015, 70 years after the war ended, he was appointed a *Chevalier* of the French *Légion d'Honneur* for his contribution to the liberation of France.

**David Leece**