

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION
CAPTAIN ROBERT A. BELL
MEDICAL CORPS, U. S. NAVY

Robert Alexander Bell was born in Lone Tree, Iowa, on April 19, 1907, son of James H. and Frances Mae (Petsel) Bell, both now deceased. He was graduated from Lone Tree High School and attended the State University of Iowa for seven years, receiving the degrees of Bachelor of Arts in 1927 and Doctor of Medicine in 1931. He was commissioned Lieutenant (jg) in the Medical Corps of the U. S. Navy on June 18, 1931, and through subsequent promotions attained the rank of Captain, to date from March 25, 1945.

After a year's internship in the Naval Hospital, League Island, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, he served there from June 1932 until May 1933 as a Ward Medical Officer. During the two years to follow, he was assigned to the Civilian Conservation Corps, under the U. S. Army, as Camp Surgeon and District Medical Officer. In September 1935 he reported to the Naval Hospital, Washington, D. C., and after four months' duty as Ward Medical Officer, was assigned as Assistant to the Attending Physician at the U. S. Capitol, during the 74th Congress.

From October 1936 to February 1937 he again served as Ward Medical Officer at the Naval Hospital, Washington, D. C., and for fifteen months thereafter was at sea aboard the USS MISSISSIPPI, with duty first as Junior, and later as Acting Senior Medical Officer. He was transferred in April 1938 to duty as Medical Officer on the Staff of Destroyer Division SIX, Pacific Fleet. Detached in July 1939, he returned to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for three months' duty as Ward Medical Officer at the Naval Hospital.

A years' duty as Chief of Medical Service and Officer-in-Charge of the Laboratory at the U. S. Naval Hospital, Parris Island, South Carolina, preceded a tour of duty in the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., from October 1940, during the early period of World War II until February 1943.

He received a Letter of Commendation, with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, from the Secretary of the Navy, which follows in part:

"For outstanding performance of duty as Officer in Charge of the Enlisted Sarvey Section between October 1940 and February 1943, and later as Officer in Charge of the entire Disability Disposition Section of the Division of Physical Qualifications and Medical Records of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. Commander Bell formulated policies concerning physical standards and established liaison with the Bureau of Naval Personnel and Commandant, Marine Corps, whereby these positions were effectuated. These policies resulted in effective mobilization and deployment of the Fleet Naval Reserve Force, maximum utilization of Naval personnel during a period of critical manpower shortage, and uniformly equitable disposition of disabled Naval personnel..."

Ordered to sea, he joined the USS BOISE, and as Medical Officer of that cruiser, participated in the bombardment of the Gela, Cape Calava and Cape Milazzo areas in Sicily, in July and August 1943; furnishing fire support to the U. S. Seventh Army; the bombardment of Palmi, Italy on August 17, 1943; landing of British Commando Troops at Taranto, Italy, on September 9; and the bombardment of Salerno, Italy, furnishing fire support to the U. S. Fifth Army, September 12-16, 1943.

The BOISE was transferred to the Pacific war area late in 1943, and as her Medical Officer, Captain Bell participated in bombardment of Alexishaven, New Guinea, on January 25-26, 1944; bombardment of Humboldt Bay, Dutch New Guinea, and support of landing operations on April 22; and the bombardment of Sawar and Wakde airdromes, Dutch New Guinea, on April 29-30, 1944. He also was aboard during the BOISE's operations (bombardment and landing) in the Wakde Toem Area, Dutch New Guinea, and in the Biak Island and Noemfoor Island, Schouten Group Areas, from May to July 1944.

Returning to the United States, he reported to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in August 1944, and served until October 1947 as Officer-in-Charge, Disability Disposition Branch, Physical Qualifications and Medical Records Division. He was sent to the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Medicine for the postgraduate course in Internal Medicine, and in June 1948 returned to his duty in the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. He was designated Director of the Physical Qualification and Medical Records Division in July 1949, and as such has served as Principal Medical Member, Physical Review Council, and a member of numerous boards in the Navy Department and the Department of Defense.

In addition to the Commendation Ribbon, Captain Bell has the American Defense Service Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the National Defense Service Medal.

He is a member of Alpha Omega Alpha and Phi Rho Sigma fraternities; American Medical Association; Iowa State Medical Society; American College of Physicians; and the Army and Navy Country Club, Arlington, Virginia.

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