

# A Gentleman and a Rascal



LAURA COLE

Autobiography  
by  
**Brian Buzzard**

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## **CHAPTER 9**

### **A short time in America**

**Front Cover:** I wish to thank artist Laura Cole for her kind permission to use the second painting from the triptych **Kimberley Grasses**.

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## CHAPTER 9

### A short time in America

On the 1st June, 1943, I was transferred temporarily to a ferry-crew, flying unit. Later in June we were flown by an American Liberator to San Francisco. It took forty hours and twenty minutes flying time spread over four days, to get there. We called in at Biak, Canton Island and Hawaii. We went from San Francisco to San Diego to pick up our aircraft, but when we got there, the Aleution Islands campaign was going on and the Americans lost quite a few Catalinas in that engagement. We had to wait five weeks until there were more available. We spent a week in Los Angeles as the guest of the owner of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel on the Hollywood Boulevard. He had a son "down under" in the American navy and was a wonderful host to us. He introduced us to an engineer called Ralph Read who worked at the NBC studio. He took us there on several occasions to see their live shows. We met Cary Grant, who was in the American airforce, Veronica Lake and Bing Crosby. Bing invited us to his home to meet his wife, Dixie Lee and his four sons. We had a swim in their pool and after a few drinks we went on our way. While we were leaving the studio we met Bob Hope who is a natural wit. When Cary Grant's girlfriend arrived, Gary gave her a nice bouquet. At that time Hope was leaving and from his car he shouted to the girlfriend, "Honey, don't let him kid you that he bought those flowers for you, his car bumped into a hearse on the way to the studio. " At the Fox studios we met Dorothy Lamour who was making one of her South Sea Island pictures. I remember how brown she was, and coming from Australia where we work on our tans, I remember wondering whether such a colour was natural or the result of creams, however I did not get a chance to find out. When we returned to Long Beach, Los Angeles in 1945 to pick up Liberators, we renewed our friendship with Ralph Read, who again treated us with great hospitality and took us to the various studios.

While we were waiting around San Diego for our plane, three of us, Les Angel from Dalwallinu, Nigel Ross, a farmer from Holbrook NSW, his

girlfriend Polly Potter and I decided to go down to Tijuana in Mexico for a day. It was just over twenty miles by road and we wanted to see a bullfight for the first time. We went to the fight and then to a vaudeville show in the late afternoon. It was a strip show and when the girl completed her disrobing act, the lights were put out. A couple of American sailors in the front row shone a torch on her naked body. The staff immediately pounced on them and they were thrown out into the street. During the day we had been sampling the favourite Mexican drink called Tequila and the effect did not hit us until we got back to the base at North Island. We were supposed to do a conversion course the next day but the three of us were too sick to fly for a couple of days. I have not tackled Tequila since. Polly Potter was an aircraft pilot who delivered new planes all over America. Nigel kept in touch with her and she eventually came out to Australia and married him. I was told by Les Angel recently that they are still happily married and living on a farm in NSW.

We tested the Catalina aircraft when they became available to us and then we set out for Kaneone Bay in the Hawaiian Islands. However, we had to turn back after two hours because, unfortunately, we lost a motor. It is not a pleasant experience landing a Catalina at night on one motor, but we had sent a radio message to the US Navy at North Island to say that we were returning, so they had a flare path set and a crash boat waiting for us when we landed. After waiting nearly a week for repairs we finally set out for Rathmines, calling in at Hawaii, Johnson Island, Suva and Noumea. That trip took seventy hours flying time over seven days.



**Les Angel, Brian Buzzard, Polly Potter & Nigel Ross in Tijuana, Mexico.**

I have returned to America twice with my daughter Terese, once to visit friends in the USA and the second time to Hawaii, when we went over to our International Catalina Reunion and the 50th Anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbour. We were there for eleven days and had a full program. About ninety Australians, including fifteen from WA, made the trip. The American Catalina Club and their Veteran's Affairs organisation could not have been more friendly and they catered for all of our wants. The final event was a march through Honolulu. It was a wonderful feeling to go back there in peace-time. Some of the bullet marks were still on some of the buildings at Hickham Airfield, which I had been to on two occasions during the war, when we were on our way to ferry Catalina and Liberator aircraft out to Australia. We went over to Kanahoe Bay, where we landed once on a flight from San Diego, which took us twenty hours and thirty five minutes. We ran out of fuel after landing and had to use a crash boat to tow us to a mooring. It revived old memories. We flew back to Sydney and I stopped off there for a few days to see some old Catalina mates. I still see some of the people from WA who made that trip, but a few have passed on since.