

= Bobby Gibbes =

Robert Henry Maxwell (Bobby) Gibbes , DSO , DFC and Bar , OAM (6 May 1916 ? 11 April 2007) was a leading Australian fighter ace of World War II , and the longest @-@ serving wartime commanding officer of No. 3 Squadron RAAF . He was officially credited with 10 ¼ aerial victories , although his score is often reported as 12 , including two shared . Gibbes was also credited with five aircraft probably destroyed , and a further 16 damaged . He commanded No. 3 Squadron in North Africa from February 1942 to April 1943 , apart from a brief period when he was injured .

Born in rural New South Wales , Gibbes worked as a jackaroo and salesman before joining the Royal Australian Air Force in February 1940 . Posted to the Middle East in April 1941 , he flew with No. 3 Squadron in the Syria ? Lebanon Campaign , and became commanding officer during the Western Desert Campaign , where his leadership and fighting skills earned him the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar . Subsequently posted to the South West Pacific , he served with No. 80 Wing of the Australian First Tactical Air Force , and took part in the " Morotai Mutiny " of April 1945 . After the war he spent many years in New Guinea developing local industry , for which he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2004 . He continued to fly until the age of 85 , and died five years later in 2007 .

= = Family and early career = =

The only son of Henry and Cora Gibbes , Robert Henry Maxwell (Bobby) Gibbes was born on 6 May 1916 in Young , New South Wales . He came from a family that had long been active in the government and military . His great @-@ grandfather , Colonel John George Nathaniel Gibbes , built his residence " Wotonga " at Kirribilli ; the property was later refurbished to become Sydney 's Admiralty House . Gibbes ' grandfather , Augustus Onslow Manby Gibbes , owned Yarralumla station , subsequently the official residence of Australia 's Governor @-@ General . His father was a grazier and his uncle Fred a Sopwith Camel pilot in World War I who was killed in action . Gibbes attended All Saints College in Bathurst , and various schools in Manly , before earning a living as a jackaroo .

Gibbes was working as a salesman when he joined the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 2 February 1940 . He exaggerated his height , which was below the minimum requirement , to gain entrance . In a 1990 interview , he related that he had undertaken flying lessons at his own expense prior to enlisting , but " when war was declared , I thought I 'd wait for King George to pay for the rest " . He further recalled that he applied to join the Royal Australian Navy at the same time , but was still waiting for a response . After completing flying training at Mascot and Richmond , New South Wales , and Point Cook , Victoria , Gibbes was commissioned a pilot officer on 28 June 1940 . His initial posting was to No. 23 Squadron , which operated CAC Wirraways and Lockheed Hudsons out of Archerfield , Queensland . He was promoted to flying officer on 26 December 1940 .

Two of Gibbes ' cousins ? both born in 1915 and , like Bobby , only sons ? were also pilots in the RAAF . Rodney Gibbes joined the Air Force in July 1936 . Peter Gibbes , an airline pilot before the war , enlisted in December 1940 . Each earned the Distinguished Flying Cross , Rodney in 1940 for his part in a Wellington bomber raid in Europe while serving with the Royal Air Force , and Peter in 1942 for his actions flying a Hudson bomber with No. 1 Squadron RAAF during the Malayan Campaign . Rodney died in action over Italy on 16 May 1943 .

= = Combat service = =

= = = Middle East = = =

In April 1941 , Gibbes was posted to the Middle East as adjutant of No. 450 Squadron . The following month he transferred to No. 3 Squadron , which was flying Hawker Hurricanes . In June , after converting to P @-@ 40 Tomahawks , the squadron commenced operations in the Syria ?

Lebanon Campaign . Gibbes was credited with a probable victory over a Junkers Ju 88 near Bierut on 13 June . On 11 July he claimed his first " kill " , a Dewoitine D.520 fighter of the Vichy French air force , over Aleppo . He shared in its destruction with John Jackson , after which the pair tossed a coin to take full credit for it , and Gibbes won . In September , No. 3 Squadron transferred to the Western Desert Campaign , where it saw action against German and Italian forces . On 20 November , during Operation Crusader , Gibbes took part in the destruction of a Messerschmitt Bf 110 with three other pilots , crash landing back at base with damage to his own aircraft . He had a particularly successful day on 25 November , when he shot down two Fiat G.50s and damaged three more , as well as a Messerschmitt Bf 109 . Five days later he destroyed a G.50 over Tobruk . On 22 January 1942 , he brought down a Junkers Ju 87 and damaged two G.50s. He was promoted to acting flight lieutenant the same month .

Raised to acting squadron leader , Gibbes was appointed commanding officer of No. 3 Squadron on 26 February 1942 . The unit 's Tomahawks had by this time been replaced by Kittyhawks , and Gibbes emblazoned his with a cartoon depicting a kangaroo kicking a dachshund in the rear . He claimed a Bf 109 (possibly a misidentified Macchi C.202) during the Siege of Tobruk on 7 May . On 26 May , he was shot down while leading an attack on a heavily escorted force of Luftwaffe bombers near El Adem . After firing at and probably destroying a Bf 109 , Gibbes was hit by fire from a Ju 88 and had to bail out . Part of his parachute became entangled with the tailplane of his stricken aircraft and he struggled to escape . He broke his ankle in the landing but within six weeks was flying again , his leg still in a cast . Due to his enforced absence , fellow ace Nicky Barr was given command of No. 3 Squadron until he himself was shot down and taken prisoner on 26 June , at which point Gibbes again took charge of the unit . Barr later noted that although Gibbes was not a brilliant shot , he had the keenest eyesight of any pilot he knew when it came to locating enemy aircraft and alerting his fellows for the attack . Another No. 3 Squadron pilot , Tom Russell , also recalled that Gibbes was particularly adept at finding targets , and that " if we got scattered in a dogfight he had the uncanny ability to get us back into formation in a very short space of time " .

Gibbes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on 28 July 1942 for his actions on 26 May , the citation noting his " exceptional skill and gallantry " . On 1 September , he destroyed a Bf 109 and damaged two others during the Battle of Alam el Halfa , east of El Alamein . He claimed No. 3 Squadron 's 200th victim , a Bf 109F , during the Battle of El Alamein on 28 October . Air Marshal Sir Peter Drummond , Deputy Air Officer Commanding @-@ in @-@ Chief Middle East , sent him a signal reading " Heartiest congratulations to you and all ranks in the squadron on the achievement of your double century ? not out " . Around this time Gibbes also managed to fly Bf 109F and G fighters captured from the Germans , and came away impressed . He was credited with another Bf 109 on 17 November . On 21 December , he landed his Kittyhawk in rugged terrain near Hun , Libya , to rescue a fellow pilot who had been forced down . Gibbes threw out his own parachute to make room in the cockpit for his passenger and lost part of his undercarriage taking off , necessitating a one @-@ wheeled landing back at base . Recommended for the Victoria Cross for this action , he was instead awarded the Distinguished Service Order , which was promulgated on 15 January 1943 and cited his " outstanding qualities of leadership and enthusiasm " . Gibbes himself crash landed behind enemy lines on 14 January 1943 , walking 50 miles (80 km) in the desert before being picked up by a British Army patrol . He was awarded a bar to his DFC for this feat , and for his " exceptional leadership , skill and courage , contributing in a large measure to the success of the squadron he commands " . The award made him the most highly decorated pilot in the RAAF .

On 22 January 1943 , Gibbes claimed his last kill , a C.202. He was officially credited with a total of 10 ¼ victories , though other estimates gave him a score of 12 , including two shared . He was also credited with five " probables " , and another 16 damaged . During his tour of duty in the Middle East , he flew 274 sorties and became No. 3 Squadron 's longest @-@ serving wartime commanding officer . Squadron member Bob Smith recalled him as lacking somewhat in administrative ability , but an " Errol Flynn " in the air . Gibbes , for his part , later admitted to being in " an absolute state of terror " before missions , only to " sort of become mechanical " once the shooting started . He described his post @-@ combat feelings thus :

Man becomes animal when he thinks he is about to die . As you fly back to your base , now safe at last , a feeling of light @-@ hearted exuberance comes over you . It is wonderful to still be alive and it is , I think , merely the after @-@ effect of violent , terrible fear .

= = = South West Pacific = = =

Gibbes handed over command of No. 3 Squadron to Squadron Leader Brian Eaton on 19 April 1943 . With his rank of squadron leader confirmed the same month , Gibbes departed North Africa to serve at RAAF Overseas Headquarters , London , until October . While in England he converted to de Havilland Mosquito night fighters and was slated to command No. 464 Squadron RAAF , but was instead posted back to Australia , via Canada . There , according to Gibbes , he gave a series of morale @-@ building lectures on air combat to Empire Air Training Scheme students : " So I , you know , went round and lied like hell . I said that it was all a piece of cake . " In January 1944 , he joined No. 2 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Mildura , Victoria , becoming chief flying instructor in March . He worked with Clive Caldwell , Australia 's top @-@ scoring ace , to improve the success rate at No. 2 OTU by personally selecting the most promising pilots from local service flying training schools . Gibbes was promoted to temporary wing commander on 1 July . In October he was posted to Darwin in the Northern Territory , flying Supermarine Spitfires as wing leader of No. 80 Wing . The role made him deputy to Group Captain Caldwell , the wing 's commanding officer . Gibbes later suffered burns in a crash landing following engine failure . In December he met , in his own words , " a little dark @-@ haired popsy " named Jeannine Ince , a volunteer with the Red Cross who had nursed him in hospital . They married on 23 January 1945 .

No. 80 Wing had begun transferring to the Dutch East Indies in December 1944 , and the main body followed in January 1945 . Gibbes ' injuries prevented him from joining the formation at its base on Morotai , where it came under the control of the Australian First Tactical Air Force (No. 1 TAF) , until 9 March . Once there , he took over as temporary commanding officer for a few days when Caldwell was called to Manila . In April , Gibbes was one of eight senior pilots , including Caldwell and fellow aces Wilf Arthur and John Waddy , who tendered their resignations in protest at the relegation of RAAF fighter squadrons to apparently worthless ground @-@ attack missions . The incident became known as the " Morotai Mutiny " . Gibbes later declared that " ... after I myself had been operating for a week or so and had a really good look around and seen the futility of the operations which had been given , I could not see any point in carrying on . I certainly lost all keenness for remaining in the service . " As a former jackaroo , he was especially upset about one sortie that involved attacking cattle : " I felt horrible about it , being an ex bushy ... at about lunch time I went out and darned if I didn 't have to turn butcher . And Heavens , it was butchering too , in every sense of the word . No ? not the Japs . Cattle ... If we are to get the Japs out of this area without loss of human lives , starvation will be our main weapon ... God , I hated doing it but could do nothing else . Felt as sick as hell . " No action was taken against the " mutineers " for their attempted resignations ; a subsequent government inquiry found that their protest was justified . In the meantime , Gibbes and Caldwell were court martialled for their involvement in alcohol trafficking on Morotai . Both were reduced to the rank of flight lieutenant ; the Air Officer Commanding No. 1 TAF , Air Commodore Harry Cobby , himself shortly to be dismissed over the " mutiny " , restored Gibbes to squadron leader effective 23 April .

= = Post @-@ war career and later life = =

In July 1945 , Gibbes was assigned to the staff of RAAF Headquarters , Melbourne . Following his discharge from the Air Force on 11 January 1946 , he was initially employed as a stock and station agent in Coonamble , New South Wales . He flew a Butler Bat twin @-@ engined aircraft to facilitate his work , reportedly the only New South Welshman in his profession to do so at the time . Gibbes spent much of the next 30 years in New Guinea , pioneering the island 's transport , coffee and hospitality industries . In January 1948 , he formed Gibbes Sepik Airways using , among other types , three German Junkers Ju 52s , one of which was said to have been the personal transport of

senior Luftwaffe commander Albert Kesselring . He was joined briefly in this venture , headquartered at Wewak , by Nicky Barr . Gibbes also established a tea and coffee plantation at Mount Hagen , New Guinea , in 1950 , and served as a member of the RAAF Active Reserve , based in Townsville , Queensland , from 1952 until 1957 . In 1958 , he sold his share in Gibbes Sepik Airways to Mandated Airlines , which was later bought out by Ansett Australia . He continued to develop coffee plantations in New Guinea , and built a large chain of hotels beginning with the Bird of Paradise in Goroka .

Gibbes sold his interests in New Guinea in 1972 . He spent most of the remainder of the decade in the Mediterranean , aboard his catamaran Billabong . In his 60s , he sailed Billabong from England to Australia by himself , braving heavy seas and Malaysian pirates along the way . By 1979 he was living in Sydney and had begun building his own twin @-@ engined plane , which he eventually took to the air in 1990 . In 1994 , Gibbes published his autobiography , You Live But Once . He continued to fly until forced to give up his civil aviation licence at the age of 85 . In 2002 , he appeared in an episode of the television series Australian Story dedicated to Nicky Barr . Gibbes was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia on 26 January 2004 for " service to aviation and to tourism , particularly in Papua New Guinea " . He died of a stroke at Mona Vale Hospital in Sydney on 11 April 2007 , aged 90 , and was survived by his wife and two daughters . His funeral service at St Thomas ' Church , North Sydney , was attended by 350 mourners , including the Chief of Air Force , Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd , and 40 members of No. 3 Squadron led by the commanding officer . A Spitfire in the " Grey Nurse " livery of one of Gibbes ' World War II aircraft overflew the church , along with four F / A @-@ 18 Hornet jet fighters from No. 3 Squadron in a " missing man " formation .