

= Nicky Barr =

Andrew William " Nicky " Barr , OBE , MC , DFC & Bar ( 10 December 1915 ? 12 June 2006 ) was a member of the Australian national rugby union team , who became a fighter ace in the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) during World War II . He was credited with 12 aerial victories , all scored flying the Curtiss P @-@ 40 fighter . Born in New Zealand , Barr was raised in Victoria and first represented the state in rugby in 1936 . Selected to play for Australia in the United Kingdom in 1939 , he had just arrived in England when the tour was cancelled following the outbreak of war . He joined the RAAF in 1940 and was posted to North Africa with No. 3 Squadron in September 1941 . The squadron 's highest @-@ scoring ace , he attained his first three victories in the P @-@ 40D Tomahawk and the remainder in the P @-@ 40E Kittyhawk .

Barr 's achievements as a combat pilot earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar . Shortly after taking command of No. 3 Squadron in May 1942 , he was shot down and captured by Axis forces , and incarcerated in Italy . He escaped and assisted other Allied fugitives to safety , receiving for his efforts the Military Cross , a rare honour for an RAAF pilot . Repatriated to England , he saw action during the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 before returning to Australia as chief instructor with No. 2 Operational Training Unit . After the war he became a company director , and rejoined the RAAF as an active reserve officer from 1951 to 1953 . From the early 1960s he was heavily involved in the oilseed industry , for which he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1983 . He died in 2006 , aged 90 .

= = Early career = =

Andrew Barr was born in Wellington , New Zealand , on 10 December 1915 ; he had a twin brother , Jack . The family moved to Australia when the boys were six . Growing up in Melbourne , Andrew attended Kew Public School and played Australian rules football . He was also the Victorian Schoolboys ' 100 yards athletics champion three years in succession , from 1926 to 1928 . In 1931 , aged fifteen , he began his association with the Lord Somers Camp and Power House social and sporting organisations located at Western Port . After leaving school , Barr studied construction at Swinburne Technical College , but later took a diploma course in accountancy and made it his profession . He started playing rugby union in 1935 through a friend in the Power House club . Weighing 80 kilograms ( 180 lb ) and just under 6 feet ( 180 cm ) tall , Barr gained selection for Victoria as a hooker the following year . In 1939 , he was chosen to play in the United Kingdom with the Australian national team , the Wallabies . The tour was cancelled less than a day after the team arrived in the UK on 2 September , due to the outbreak of World War II . Keen to serve as a fighter pilot , Barr initially tried to enlist in the Royal Air Force , but withdrew his application when told that it was unlikely he would fly anytime in the near future , and that he could expect only administrative duties in the interim .

Returning to Australia on the RMS Strathaird , Barr joined the Royal Australian Air Force as an air cadet on 4 March 1940 . After undergoing instruction on Tiger Moths at No. 3 Elementary Flying Training School , Essendon , and on Hawker Demons and Avro Ansons at No. 1 Service Flying Training School , Point Cook , he was commissioned as a pilot officer on 24 September . He gained a reputation as something of a rebel during training , and became forever known as " Nicky " , for " Old Nick " , or the Devil . In his quest to gain assignment as a fighter pilot , he had deliberately aimed poorly during bombing practice , a stratagem also adopted by at least two of his fellow students . By November 1940 , he had been posted to No. 23 ( City of Brisbane ) Squadron , flying CAC Wirraways on patrol off the Queensland coast . The aircraft was , according to Barr , " our front line fighter in those days , but it didn 't take too long to realise that the capacity of the Wirraway , compared with the types of planes that we were going to encounter , left much to be desired " . Though his duties frustrated him somewhat , Barr was grateful to have this extensive flight experience under his belt when he eventually saw combat . While based in Queensland , he served as honorary aide @-@ de @-@ camp to the Governor , Sir Leslie Wilson , and also captained the RAAF rugby union team . He was promoted to flying officer on 24 March 1941 .

= = Combat service = =

Barr was posted to North Africa on 28 September 1941 , to fly with No. 3 Squadron under the command of Squadron Leader Peter Jeffrey . He converted to P @-@ 40D Tomahawk fighters at an RAF operational training unit in Khartoum . There he also received his " goolie chit " , a piece of paper to be shown to local tribesmen in the event he was shot down , reading in Arabic : " don 't kill the bearer , feed him and protect him , take him to the English and you will be rewarded . Peace be upon you . " Returning to North Africa , Barr achieved his first aerial victory , over a Messerschmitt Bf 110 , on 12 December . He followed this up with a Junkers Ju 88 and a Messerschmitt Bf 109 the next day . The squadron then re @-@ equipped with P @-@ 40E Kittyhawks ; Barr was flying the new model when he became an ace on New Year 's Day 1942 , shooting down two Junkers Ju 87 Stukas . On 8 March , he led a flight of six Kittyhawks to intercept a raid on Tobruk by twelve Ju 87s escorted by ten Macchi C. 202s and two Bf 109s . The Australians destroyed six Macchis and three Ju 87s without loss , Barr personally accounting for one of the Macchis .

Eventually credited with victories over twelve enemy aircraft , plus two probables and eight damaged , Barr became No. 3 Squadron 's highest @-@ scoring member . He flew a total of eighty @-@ four combat sorties , twenty of them in one fortnight , and six on 16 June 1942 alone . His philosophy was that the P @-@ 40 was not a top @-@ class fighter , but that its shortcomings " could be offset by unbridled aggression " , so he resolved to treat aerial combat as he would a boxing match and " overcome much better opponents by simply going for them " . Bobby Gibbes became No. 3 Squadron 's commanding officer in February 1942 , and made Barr his senior flight commander . Promoted to flight lieutenant on 1 April , Barr was raised to acting squadron leader and appointed to command the unit in May , barely six months after he commenced operations , following Gibbes 's hospitalisation with a broken ankle . Barr had never sought leadership of the squadron , and felt that others were just as well qualified for the role . As a commander he delegated most administrative tasks to his adjutant but , contrary to normal practice , wrote letters to the next @-@ of @-@ kin of casualties himself .

Three times while serving with No. 3 Squadron , Barr was himself shot down . The first occasion was on 11 January 1942 when , having destroyed a Bf 109 and a Fiat G.50 , he was preparing to touch down in the desert to pick up a fellow pilot who had crash landed . He had his undercarriage halfway down when he was " jumped " by two other Bf 109s . He immediately engaged both and shot one down before more German fighters arrived and he was hit and forced to land behind enemy lines . As one of the German planes came in low to strafe the downed Kittyhawk , Barr ran straight at it in an attempt to throw the pilot off his aim , and was injured by fragments of rock sent airborne by impact from cannon shells . A tribe of friendly Senussi Arabs found him , dressed his wounds , and helped him return to Allied lines . For this exploit , and his earlier successes , Barr was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross ( DFC ) , the full citation being published in the London Gazette on 20 February 1942 :

This officer , who commenced operational flying in November , 1941 , has displayed the greatest keenness and skill as a fighter pilot . In December , 1941 , during a patrol over the Derna area , he shot down a Messerschmitt 110 ; the next day , in the same area , he destroyed a Messerschmitt 110 and a Junkers 88 . One day in January , 1942 , his squadron formed part of an escort to bomber aircraft operating over El Agheila . Enemy aircraft were encountered and , in the ensuing engagement , Flying Officer Barr attacked 2 Italian fighters , one of which he shot down . He then observed one of his fellow pilots , who had been shot down , waving to him from the ground but , when preparing to make a landing in an attempt to rescue him , Flying Officer Barr was attacked by 2 Messerschmitt 109s . Although the undercarriage of his aircraft was not fully retracted , he immediately manoeuvred to engage the attackers , only to find that his guns had jammed . Quickly rectifying the fault he delivered an accurate burst of fire which caused one of the Messerschmitts to disintegrate in the air . A further 2 enemy aircraft joined in the combat and Flying Officer Barr was wounded and forced down . While on the ground he was further wounded by the enemy 's fire but , despite this , he made his way through the enemy 's lines and rejoined our own forces some 3 days

later . He brought back much valuable information regarding the disposition of enemy tanks and defences . Flying Officer Barr displayed the greatest courage and tenacity throughout . He has destroyed 8 enemy aircraft .

On 25 May 1942 , Barr had to land in the desert when his engine overheated . Having just taken off the engine cowling , he spotted enemy tanks approaching and immediately took off with the engine exposed to the elements , safely landing back at base . He was shot down for the second time on 30 May , when he engaged eight Bf 109s and destroyed one before being hit and forced to crash land at high speed in no @-@ man 's land . He came down in a minefield during a fierce tank battle , and was forced to remain where he was as troops of both sides slowly converged on him ; British forces managed to reach him first and , after treatment for wounds , he again returned to his squadron . On 26 June , however , after being attacked by two Bf 109s and bailing out of his burning Kittyhawk , he was captured by Italian soldiers and taken as a prisoner @-@ of @-@ war , first to Tobruk , and then to Italy , where he received hospital treatment for serious wounds . He later learned that the pilot who shot him down was Oberleutnant Werner Schroer , a Luftwaffe ace credited with sixty @-@ one victories in North Africa . Bobby Gibbes , having recovered from his own injuries , again took command of No. 3 Squadron . During his incarceration , on 5 February 1943 , Barr was awarded a Bar to his DFC for " destroying further enemy aircraft " .

Barr tried to escape from his confinement four times . By November 1942 he had recovered sufficiently from the injuries received in June to break out of the hospital where he was being held in Bergamo , northern Italy . He made his way to the Swiss border , but was challenged by an Italian customs official , whom he struck with a rock before being recaptured . Court @-@ martialled on a charge of murder , Barr only avoided a death sentence when the Swiss Red Cross colonel representing him located the official and proved that he had not died . Barr was instead sentenced to ninety days solitary confinement in Gavi Prison Camp , Genoa . In August 1943 , with Italy on the verge of surrender , prisoners of war were rounded up for transport to Germany . Barr jumped from a moving train bound for the Brenner Pass and joined a group of Italian partisans in Pontremoli , remaining at large for two months before again being captured . Taken to a transit camp just over the Austrian border , Barr and fourteen other prisoners escaped by tunnelling under the barbed wire . Eventually he managed to link up with an Allied special operations unit , which was gathering intelligence behind enemy lines , sabotaging Axis infrastructure , and helping Allied prisoners and Italian refugees escape over the Apennine Mountains along the so @-@ called " Alpine Route " . Barr was recaptured and escaped once more before finally making it through the Alpine crossing himself , leading a group of more than twenty . After reaching friendly lines in March 1944 , he was sent to a military hospital in Vasto , weighing only 55 kilograms ( 121 lb ) and in poor health , suffering malaria , malnutrition , and blood poisoning . The assistance he rendered to fellow Allied fugitives earned him the Military Cross ( MC ) for " Exceptional courage in organising escapes " ; the award was gazetted on 1 December 1944 . He is thought to be one of only five or six RAAF pilots to receive the MC during World War II .

Posted to Britain in April 1944 , Barr went ashore at Omaha Beach two days after D @-@ Day as part of an air support control unit . During the campaign in Normandy , he flew rocket @-@ armed Hawker Typhoons on operations against V @-@ 1 flying bomb launch sites . After his return to Australia on 11 September , Barr was promoted to acting wing commander and appointed chief instructor at No. 2 Operational Training Unit in Mildura , Victoria , taking over from Bobby Gibbes . He also went to New Guinea and flew some ground @-@ attack missions in the Kittyhawk to gain experience in the South West Pacific theatre . Following the end of hostilities in August 1945 , Barr was treated for recurring fever and underwent two operations on his limbs in No. 6 RAAF Hospital , Heidelberg . He was discharged from the Air Force on 8 October .

= = Later career = =

After leaving the Air Force , Barr remained in Mildura with his wife , Dorothy ( Dot ) . They had met on a blind date in 1938 and been married only a few weeks when Nicky joined the RAAF . During the war she was told on three occasions that her husband was dead . The couple had two sons ,

born in 1945 and 1947 . Barr 's injuries prevented him from returning to a rugby career , and he took up yachting as a sport . He also briefly assisted fellow No. 3 Squadron veteran Bobby Gibbes in an airline venture in New Guinea , before going into business as a company manager and director with civil engineering and pharmaceutical firms . Barr rejoined the RAAF on 20 March 1951 as a pilot in the active Citizen Air Force ( CAF ) , with the acting rank of wing commander . On 15 April 1953 , he transferred to the CAF reserve . A member of the Royal Air Forces Escaping Society , Barr began travelling to Italy with his wife on a regular basis in the late 1950s to seek out and offer assistance to those who had helped him during his wartime escape attempts .

In 1961 , Barr became General Manager of Meggitt Ltd , an oilseed @-@ crushing firm ; he eventually rose to become Executive Chairman . The firm 's board was joined in 1971 by the recently retired Chief of the Air Staff , Air Marshal Sir Alister Murdoch . Barr 's work in the industry led to his appointment in the 1983 New Year Honours as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire ( OBE ) . The same year , he became Australian representative and Chairman of the International Oil Seed Group . In June 1987 , Barr accepted an invitation to join John Glenn , Chuck Yeager , and fifteen other famed flyers in a so @-@ called " Gathering of Eagles " for a seminar at the USAF Air Command and Staff College in Montgomery , Alabama . Generally reluctant to talk publicly about the war , he agreed to discuss his experiences during an episode of the television series Australian Story in 2002 , appearing with his biographer Peter Dornan , and Bobby Gibbes . By this time Barr was said to be receiving daily treatment for the injuries he had suffered in combat . He died at the age of ninety on 12 June 2006 , a few months after his wife . Four F / A @-@ 18 Hornet jet fighters from No. 3 Squadron overflew his funeral service on the Gold Coast , Queensland . He was further honoured at a rugby test match between Australia and England at Telstra Dome in Melbourne on 17 June , the day after his funeral . On 14 September 2006 , No. 3 Squadron dedicated a stone memorial in Barr 's honour ; the unveiling was attended by his sons Bob and Brian .