

= Peter Turnbull ( RAAF officer ) =

Peter St George Bruce Turnbull , DFC ( 9 February 1917 ? 27 August 1942 ) was an Australian fighter ace of World War II , credited with twelve aerial victories . Born in Armidale , New South Wales , he was an electrician before he joined the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) in January 1939 . After pilot training he was posted to No. 3 Squadron , which departed for action in the Middle East in July 1940 . Flying Gloster Gladiator , Hawker Hurricane and P @-@ 40 Tomahawk fighters during the North African and Syria @-@ Lebanon campaigns , Turnbull was credited with nine victories and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross . Posted to the South West Pacific in March 1942 , he joined No. 75 Squadron at Port Moresby , New Guinea , operating P @-@ 40 Kittyhawks . During the ensuing Battle of Port Moresby , he claimed three Japanese aircraft . Turnbull took over command of No. 76 Squadron in May , leading it into the Battle of Milne Bay later that year . He was killed during a mission on 27 August 1942 ; an Allied airfield in New Guinea was subsequently named for him .

= = Early career = =

The son of Archibald and Maud Turnbull , Peter Turnbull was born on 9 February 1917 in Armidale , New South Wales . After leaving school with an Intermediate Certificate , he was employed as an electrician in Glen Innes , where his family owned property . In 1938 , Turnbull enlisted in the 12 / 24th Light Horse Regiment , a militia unit . He joined the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) as an air cadet on 16 January 1939 , and underwent instruction at No. 1 Flying Training School in Point Cook , Victoria . Graduating on 20 October 1939 , he was commissioned a pilot officer and assigned to No. 3 ( Army Cooperation ) Squadron , which operated Hawker Demons out of RAAF Station Richmond , New South Wales . He was promoted to flying officer on 20 April 1940 , and posted to the Middle East with his unit on 15 July , disembarking at Suez , Egypt , the following month .

= = Combat service = =

= = = Middle East = = =

During the North African campaign in late 1940 , Turnbull undertook close air support in Gloster Gauntlets and fighter missions in Gloster Gladiators . He was credited with probably destroying a Fiat CR.42 during the Battle of Bardia on 26 December , and with damaging a Fiat G.50 on 25 January 1941 , the last sortie No. 3 Squadron flew with the Gladiator before converting to Hawker Hurricanes . On 3 April , he claimed four Messerschmitt Bf 110 heavy fighters in a single sortie flying a Hurricane he had christened Ortozo ; his commanding officer praised him as " quick to the kill " .

After converting to P @-@ 40 Tomahawks , No. 3 Squadron took part in the Syria @-@ Lebanon campaign . Turnbull became an ace ? the first flying the new fighter ? on 15 June 1941 , when he destroyed a Vichy French Martin 167 bomber in southern Syria . He shot down two more of the same type over Palmyra less than two weeks later , and followed this up by claiming two Vichy Dewoitine D.520 fighters during escort duty on 10 July . He was promoted to flight lieutenant the same month . With his tally of victories in the Middle East standing at nine , Turnbull was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the 116 operational sorties and 200 hours he had flown , numerous enemy aircraft destroyed in the air and on the ground , and " magnificent fighting spirit and great skill " . The decoration was promulgated in the London Gazette on 10 October 1941 , and eventually presented to his father after Turnbull 's death . He returned to Australia that November to serve in the South West Pacific .

= = = South West Pacific = = =

Turnbull was posted to No. 24 Squadron at RAAF Station Archerfield , Queensland , in December

1941 . He then served on the staff of No. 3 Service Flying Training School , Amberley , during January and February 1942 . In March , he joined No. 75 Squadron in New Guinea as a flight commander under Squadron Leader " Old John " Jackson , another veteran and ace from No. 3 Squadron in the Middle East . Operating P @-@ 40 Kittyhawks , No. 75 Squadron quickly became engaged in the defence of Port Moresby , one of the crucial early battles in the New Guinea campaign . Even before seeing combat in the area , Turnbull was shot at . As he brought a flight of four Kittyhawks in to land for the first time at Moresby 's Seven Mile aerodrome on 21 March , nervous Australian anti @-@ aircraft gunners opened fire and damaged at least three planes before they landed . The next day , Turnbull took part in a surprise raid against Lae airfield . Five Kittyhawks led by Jackson attacked and destroyed a dozen Japanese planes on the ground , while four others led by Turnbull provided protective cover above ; he shot down one of three Mitsubishi Zeros that intercepted the Australian formation . He claimed two further victories during the battle of Port Moresby ? a pair of Zeros on 10 April , according to one account ? which brought his score to twelve . On 17 April , the commander of No. 76 Squadron , attached to No. 75 for combat experience , was killed in action , resulting in Turnbull being posted back to Australia to take over the former unit .

In May 1942 , Turnbull was formally appointed commanding officer of No. 76 ( Kittyhawk ) Squadron , then based in Townsville , Queensland . He was promoted to acting squadron leader on 8 June . Turnbull returned to New Guinea with No. 76 Squadron on 25 July , arriving at Milne Bay in company with a re @-@ equipped No. 75 Squadron . During the Battle of Milne Bay , Turnbull 's unit was engaged in air defence against Japanese raiders and offensive strikes against shipping and other targets in support of Australian ground forces . On 7 August , inclement weather forced Turnbull and another pilot to crash land on Goodenough Island ; they were later picked up by an Allied patrol . Nos. 75 and 76 Squadrons attacked the main Japanese invasion convoy as it steamed towards Milne Bay on 25 August . Two days later , Turnbull was patrolling for Japanese tanks with another member of his squadron , Flight Lieutenant Ron Kerville . While diving on an enemy target , his Kittyhawk was seen to flip on to its back at 200 feet ( 61 m ) and crash into the jungle . The cause of the incident was never fully established ; ground fire was considered a likely explanation , although mud on the control surfaces , causing a high @-@ speed stall , was also postulated . Initially posted as missing , Turnbull was confirmed dead on 4 September when troops from the 2 / 12th Battalion found the wreckage of his plane and his body inside . According to the official history of the Australian Army during World War II , the " soldiers much admired and appreciated the work of the two R.A.A.F. squadrons and , for them , the gallant Turnbull had epitomised the courage and skill of all the airmen " . Squadron Leader " Bluey " Truscott took over Turnbull 's command . By 7 September the Japanese had withdrawn their troops from the Milne Bay area ; Generals Sydney Rowell and Cyril Clowes both described the efforts of Nos. 75 and 76 Squadrons as " the decisive factor " in repulsing the invading forces .

Turnbull was credited with a total of twelve aerial victories during the war , plus one probable and two damaged . Initially buried at Dowa Dowa , Milne Bay , he was subsequently interred in Bomana War Cemetery , Port Moresby . His name appears on panel 104 of the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial , Canberra , and on the Glen Innes Roll of Honour . Milne Bay 's No. 3 Airstrip was renamed Turnbull Field in his honour ; it marked the furthest westward advance of the Japanese in the area .