

= Virgil Brennan =

Virgil Paul Brennan , DFC , DFM (6 March 1920 ? 13 June 1943) was an Australian aviator and flying ace of the Second World War . Enlisting in the Royal Australian Air Force in November 1940 , he briefly served in the European Theatre before transferring to Malta . Over the next five months , Brennan was officially credited with the destruction of 10 Axis aircraft from a total of twenty @-@ four operational sorties . Reposted to England , he was assigned as a flying instructor and collaborated in the writing of Spitfires over Malta , a book about his experiences on the island . Returning to Australia during 1943 , Brennan was killed in a flying accident at Garbutt , Queensland , in June that year .

= = Early life = =

Brennan was born in Warwick , Queensland , on 6 March 1920 to Edgar James Brennan , a solicitor , and his wife Katherine (née O 'Sullivan) . He was educated at the Christian Brothers ' School in Warwick , before moving on to Downlands College at Toowoomba and later Brisbane State High School . After leaving school , Brennan studied part @-@ time at the University of Queensland , while simultaneously being employed as a law clerk in Brisbane .

= = Second World War = =

On 8 November 1940 , Brennan enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force for service during the Second World War . Accepted for pilot training , he received his initial flight instruction in Australia . He later embarked for Canada , where he completed his flight training before being posted to the United Kingdom in August 1941 , where he was appointed to an Operational Training Unit . On graduating from this course , he was allotted to No. 64 Squadron RAF . During this time , he was advanced to temporary flight sergeant on 4 January 1942 , prior to receiving a posting to the Mediterranean Theatre the following month .

= = = Malta = = =

On arrival in the Mediterranean , Brennan was posted to No. 249 Squadron RAF . On 7 March 1942 , Brennan was one of fifteen pilots sent to the island of Malta . Flying Supermarine Spitfires , the party took off from the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle ; they were to spend the next few months in the defence of the island . As the Axis forces commenced a major aerial assault on Malta later that month , the Allied fighter pilots on the island were forced to " contend with fatigue and inadequate rations while battling the enemy 's superior forces " . On 17 March , Brennan claimed his first aerial victory when he shot down a Messerschmitt 109 .

On 20 April 1942 , Brennan added a further two aircraft to his tally when he destroyed a Messerschmitt 109 , before bringing down a Junkers 88 later that day . Praised as " a most determined and courageous pilot " , Brennan was subsequently recommended for the Distinguished Flying Medal . The announcement and accompanying citation for the award was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 22 May 1942 , reading :

Air Ministry , 22nd May , 1942 .

ROYAL AIR FORCE .

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards in recognition of gallantry displayed in flying operations against the enemy : ?

Distinguished Flying Medal .

Aus . 404692 Sergeant Virgil Paul BRENNAN , Royal Australian Air Force , No. 249 Squadron .

This airman is a most determined and courageous pilot . An exceptional shot , he always presses home his attacks with vigour . In 2 combats , he has destroyed at least 4 enemy aircraft and damaged others .

Brennan scored further aerial victories on 10 May . The following day , German Luftwaffe General

Albert Kesselring ordered a contingent of 20 Stukas and 10 Junkers Ju 88s with a small escort of fighter aircraft to bomb Grand Harbour , Malta . A formation of 50 Royal Air Force aircraft ? 37 Spitfires and 13 Hawker Hurricanes ? were dispatched to intercept the group ; Brennan was piloting one of the Spitfires . Attacking one of the Stukas , Brennan later recorded that the aircraft " disintegrated , with huge chunks flying off in every direction " . During the battle , a total of 14 German aircraft were shot down , for the loss of 2 Spitfires . In an engagement the next day , Brennan was wounded in his left arm . He was commissioned as a pilot officer later that month .

By the conclusion of his combat tour in July 1942 , Brennan had flown a total of twenty @-@ two operational sorties and was credited with destroying 10 Axis aircraft over Malta , with one probably destroyed and a further 6 damaged . For his efforts in the destruction of Axis aircraft during this period , Brennan was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross . The notification of the decoration was published in a supplement to the London Gazette on 6 October 1942 .

= = = Later war service and death = = =

Embarking from Malta during July 1942 , Brennan returned to the United Kingdom and was posted to No. 52 Operational Training Unit as an instructor with the rank of acting flight lieutenant . During this period , Brennan and fellow No. 249 Squadron pilot , Pilot Officer Ray Hesselyn , collaborated with journalist Henry Bateson on writing Spitfires over Malta , a novel relating the experiences of Brennan and Hesselyn during their time on Malta . On 17 April 1943 , Brennan was repatriated from the United Kingdom and returned to Australia .

Arriving back in Australia , Brennan was posted to the newly raised No. 79 Squadron , based at Laverton , Victoria , on 1 May 1943 . Later that month , the squadron was ordered to deploy to Goodenough Island , near New Guinea . During this time , Brennan related his previous combat experiences to fellow pilots , however his commanding officer , Squadron Leader Alan Rawlinson , noted that Brennan appeared " strained and tired " . An advance party of the squadron was moved up to Goodenough Island that month , while the pilots followed during June .

On 13 June 1943 , the pilots of No. 79 Squadron continued on their journey north , arriving at Garbutt airfield in Queensland . At approximately 14 : 00 , Brennan landed his Spitfire in the wake turbulence of the aircraft ahead of himself and touched down on the left side of the runway . Brennan was informed that he was cutting in on the path of the Spitfire following him , which was to land on the right side of the runway . Brennan landed his aircraft short , and at the conclusion of his landing run turned across the path of the second Spitfire . In the ensuing collision , Brennan sustained severe injuries and was rushed to hospital ; he died before arrival . Described as one with " an easy @-@ going nature , an engaging sense of humour and ... loyal to his friends " , Brennan was buried in Townsville War Cemetery .