

Sqdn. Ldr. Colin Leslie Gilbert 39458 RAF

Colin Gilbert was a remarkable Australian Wellington pilot serving in the Royal Air Force who was one of the leading figures in the early wartime years with Bomber Command before his death over Germany in 1942.

He was born in Maitland, South Australia in 1915, the son of Leslie and Elisabeth Gilbert and, after attending Maitland High School went to the Prince Alfred College in Adelaide where his ambition to become a pilot was nurtured. Colin was awarded a flying scholarship and, by the age of 18, had become a pilot officer in the RAAF. He was selected for training with the Royal Air Force in England in 1937 and later awarded a short service commission and joined

214 (Federated Malay States) Squadron, flying a series of pre-war bombers including the Handley Page Harrow. He later moved to 99 Squadron at Mildenhall flying Wellingtons and was with the unit when war broke out.

There was a realisation that better training was needed and Colin was chosen as one of the experienced pilots to join the newly-formed 15 Operational Training Unit, one of the forerunners to a more extensive training programme in Bomber Command. Then it was back to operations as a Wellington pilot with 75 (New Zealand) Squadron before a further spell with 15 OTU.

In late 1941 460 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force was formed at Molesworth and Colin was appointed A Flight commander, later moving with the squadron to its first operational base at Brighton in Yorkshire. In 1940 he had married Daphne, the daughter of a distinguished Royal Naval officer, in Newmarket and she moved to a house in York to be near him.

Colin was killed on the night of May 6/7 when the Wellington Mk IV, Z1254 UV-L, he was flying, was hit by flak and burst into flames near Karlsruhe during an attack on Stuttgart. Only the rear gunner survived as the aircraft crashed near Mannheim. Colin and the remainder of his crew are now buried in Durnbach War Cemetery. His was one of four aircraft lost on the raid, two of them from 460.

The others who died were the co-pilot Sgt. Reginald Murphy RAAF, observer Sgt. John Shearer RAAF, the British wireless operator Sgt. Christopher Dixon and wireless operator/air gunner Flt. Sgt. Kenneth Fogg RCAF. The sole survivor was the rear gunner, Sgt. James Lake RAAF.

His name can be found on panel 039.

Sources: 460 Squadron Association/Noel Baker 214 (FMS) Squadron Association/'Strike and Return' by Peter Firkins/Bill Chorley/Aviation safety network.



