

Gray Colin (RAF N° 41844)

DSO, DFC & 2 Bar, War Medal 1939-45, 1939-45 Star, ...



New Zealand's top-scoring fighter pilot, Colin Gray, was born in Christchurch on 9 November 1914, one of twin brothers. Both became pilots in the RAF, Ken passing out in October 1938 and Colin a year later. Ken was flying operationally in heavy bombers from the outbreak of war. He was awarded the DFC in December 1939 and subsequently killed in a flying accident on 1 May 1940. Colin Gray joined 54 Squadron in November 1939 and spent the next six months fairly uneventfully. Things changed dramatically in May 1940 and on the 25th, after escorting Swordfishes to dive-bomb Gravelines, the Squadron met a force of Bf 109's and 110's. In the ensuing action Gray destroyed a 109 before his Spitfire was badly hit. Damage to the port aileron flipped the aircraft over into a steep dive and it was only righted with great difficulty. Gray made for home, with no airspeed indicator, guns, flaps or brakes. Using the emergency CO2 bottle to lower his undercarriage, he landed safely on his second attempt. On July 13 1940 Gray shot down a Bf 109 near Calais after a long chase at sea level. Over the next seven weeks he claimed 14 enemy aircraft destroyed, shared another and probably destroyed or damaged a further fourteen. He was awarded the DFC in mid-August. In early September 54 Squadron flew north for a rest. Many of its operational pilots were posted to other units and those who remained trained new pilots. Gray went briefly to 43 (China British) Squadron but returned to 54 in January 1941 to replace Alan Deere as a flight commander when the latter was posted away. The unit returned south in late February and Gray remained until mid-June 1941 before being posted to No.1 Squadron as a flight commander. On the 16th he shared in the destruction of an He 59 floatplane and on 22 August shot down a Bf 109. Gray was awarded a Bar to his DFC on September 20, being by then credited with seventeen confirmed victories. Gray took command of 616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron in late August 1941 and led it until late February 1942, when he was posted to staff duties. After several short flying appointments in late 1942 he was posted to North Africa in late December to take command of 81 Squadron, the first unit to fly Spitfire IX's in the Middle East. He quickly claimed more victories. When the North African campaign ended on 13 May 1943 Gray was awarded the DSO, having destroyed a further five enemy aircraft and probably destroyed or damaged four others. Promoted to Wing Commander, Gray was appointed to lead 322 Wing moving to Malta to prepare for the invasion of Sicily. On 14 June 1943 he shot down a Bf 109, on the 17th a Macchi 202 and on 10 July, invasion day, he shot down a Bf 109 in flames during a patrol over the beaches. Following the Army the Wing moved to Lentini East airfield on Sicily on the 19th. Six days later Gray led the Wing on a sweep of the Milazzo area, on Sicily's north-east coast, where it was reported that German transports would be landing supplies on the beach at Cap Milazzo. The thirty-three Spitfires arrived as the Ju 52's were circling to land. Five escorting enemy fighters were destroyed in the action and

of the twenty-one transports shot down Gray claimed two. They were to be his final victories and he left 322 Wing in early September to return to Britain. He was awarded a second Bar to the DFC and was credited with twenty-seven enemy aircraft destroyed, one shared and a further twenty-two probably destroyed or damaged. Completing his second tour at the start of September 1943, he served for a month with HQ, Middle East in Cairo, and then returned to the UK, being posted as commanding officer of the Training Wing of 61 OTU at Rednal. In November he received a second Bar to his DFC. He was attached to Tangmere for a weeks operational flying during January 1944. In June 1944 he took command of the Spitfire Wing at the Fighter Leaders School at Milfield, again obtaining a few days operational experience during July. At the end of that month he became Wing Leader Flying at Detling, and then in August at Lympne, where he led the Griffon-Spitfire squadrons for anti-V-1 work, and for operations over Germany. He attended the Senior Commanders Course at Cranwell in July 1945. Following a distinguished post-war career, Colin Gray retired from the RAF in March 1961 as a Group Captain and returned to live in New Zealand. Group Captain Colin Gray died in Waikanae on 1 August 1995.

(Source: Alan Hillman: courtesy of New Zealand Fighter Pilots Museum and Aces High.)

His claims are :

24/05/1940	1 Bf-109E Probable	Calais area (54 Sqn)
24/05/1940	1 Bf-109E Probable	Calais area (54 Sqn)
25/05/1940	1 Bf-109E	S Gravelines (54 Sqn)
01/07/1940	1/3 Do-17 Probable	NW Deal (54 Sqn)
13/07/1940	1 Bf-109E	Dover - Deal (54 Sqn)
24/07/1940	1 Bf-109E Probable	NW Margate (54 Sqn)
24/07/1940	1 Bf-109E	North Foreland (54 Sqn)
25/07/1940	1 Bf-109E Damaged	E Dover (54 Sqn)
12/08/1940	1 Bf-109E	Dover (54 Sqn)
12/08/1940	1 Bf-109E	Cap Gris Nez (54 Sqn)
15/08/1940	1 Do-217 Probable	Maidstone (54 Sqn)
16/08/1940	2 Bf-109E	E Hornchurch (54 Sqn)
16/08/1940	1 Do-17 Damaged	E Hornchurch (54 Sqn)
16/08/1940	1 Bf-110 Damaged	Channel (54 Sqn)
18/08/1940	1/3 Bf-110	off Manston (54 Sqn)
18/08/1940	1 Do-17 Damaged	Kent (54 Sqn)
18/08/1940	1 Bf-110	Clacton area (54 Sqn)
18/08/1940	2 Bf-110 Damaged	Clacton area (54 Sqn)
24/08/1940	1 Bf-110	Dover - Folkstone (54 Sqn)
24/08/1940	2 Bf-109E Damaged	Dover (54 Sqn)
25/08/1940	1 Bf-109E	near Faversham (54 Sqn)
26/08/1940	1 Bf-109E Probable	Channel (54 Sqn)
28/08/1940	1 Do-17 Damaged	Channel (54 Sqn)
28/08/1940	2 Bf-109E Damaged	Channel (54 Sqn)
31/08/1940	1 Bf-109E	Maidstone (54 Sqn)
01/09/1940	1 He-111	E Biggin Hill (54 Sqn)
01/09/1940	1 Bf-109E	E Biggin Hill (54 Sqn)
02/09/1940	1 Bf-109E	Chatham area (54 Sqn)
02/09/1940	1 Bf-110	Hornchurch - Dover (54 Sqn)
03/09/1940	1/2 Bf-110 Probable	North Weald (54 Sqn)
03/09/1940	1 Bf-109E	near French Coast (54 Sqn)
16/06/1941	1/2 He-59	off Folkstone (1 Sqn)
22/08/1941	1 Bf-109F	Le Havre (41 Sqn)
22/02/1943	1 Bf-109 Probable	Bizerta (81 Sqn)
02/03/1943	1/2 Bf-109 Probable	Mateur (81 Sqn)
23/03/1943	1 Mc202	Bizerta (81 Sqn)
25/03/1943	1 Bf-109	E Beja (81 Sqn)
03/04/1943	1 Bf-109G	Tunis (81 Sqn)
20/04/1943	1/2 Bf-109 Probable	Bizerta - Tunis (81 Sqn)
20/04/1943	1 Bf-109	Tunis (81 Sqn)
23/04/1943	1 Bf-109 Damaged	Beja (81 Sqn)
28/04/1943	1 Bf-109	Beja (81 Sqn)

14/06/1943	1 Bf-109	Comiso (322 Wing)
17/06/1943	1 Mc202	Comiso - Biscari (322 Wing)
10/07/1943	1 Bf-109	'Cent' Beach (322 Wing)
25/07/1943	2 Ju-52/3m	Cap Milazzo (322 Wing)

[Close Window](#)