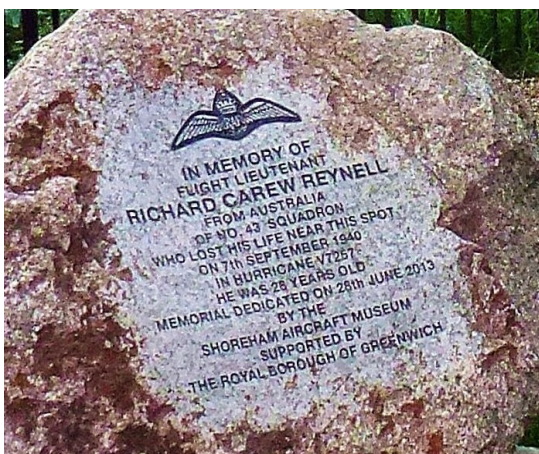


## Flight Lieutenant Richard Carew Reynell RAF 32091

### An Australian KIA 7<sup>th</sup> September 1940 Battle of Britain

On October 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, we were visiting Julie, our Woolwich -based daughter, and she suggested we go to Point Hill Park overlooking Greenwich and London to view a memorial to an Aussie pilot killed in action in 1940. The Point Hill Park is about a ten minute walk from the Greenwich mainline and DLR (Docklands Light Rail) station. Standing here was an evocative and sombre moment recalling the events overhead of 75 years earlier. When we got to the site, I was immediately struck by the name of the pilot – “Richard Carew Reynell” being “From Australia”.



The name “Reynell” rang some sort of Dionysus\* bell, bringing instinctively to mind thoughts of Reynella Wines from South Australia, whose fine wines were quite familiar to me.

When we returned to Julie’s apartment (in the grounds of the former Royal Military Academy, a few kilometres from the legendary Woolwich Arsenal, itself the original home of the Arsenal FC), I did Go a’Googling and found my irrational instinct was indeed well founded. He did come from the Reynell Family of Reynella Wines in South Australia.

\* Greek god of winemaking, ritual madness, fertility, theatre, etc.

Initially this sounded all rather interesting, but quickly turned to something far more intriguing, and as my research continued his story began to border on the incredible - but true.

## Who was he, what was he, where did he come from?

(whatever he was, he was the typical Aussie pilot – cheers!)

A look back into the background of Richard (“Dickie”) Reynell reveals a quite unique story of a remarkable individual and his equally remarkable family that shaped his early years, to become one of the very few of “The Few” that were both test pilots and fighter pilots.

Richard Carew Reynell was born on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1912 into the well-established vigneron family of Reynella Wines, at Reynella (present day Old Reynella), some 20 kms south of Adelaide, in north Onkaparinga and nearby (appropriately) Happy Valley. Theirs was the first winery in the Reynella district, established by John Reynell in 1838. He received vine cuttings from William Macarthur in New South Wales. Chateau Reynella produced its first wine in 1842 and therefore makes claims to being the country's oldest winery.



Reynella the town took its name from Reynella the winery.

Richard's father was Carew Reynell, who in 1900 left St Peters College to learn winemaking, and became manager of the family business at just 20 years of age. Carew Reynell also became expert in the business, including in 1909 creating the national favourite Reynella “Hospital” Brandy – likely being utilised for more than medicinal purposes, but arguably good marketing. Carew Reynell was also an excellent horseman (polo and Master of the Adelaide Hunt) and very absorbed with matters military. Around 1900 his father Walter Reynell refused his underage 17 year-old son's request to go off to the Boer War. Perhaps young Carew was caught up in the euphoria of the time with the embarkation of the first South Australians, being the Bushmen's Corps, farewelled with a banquet hosted by the Mayor at the Adelaide Town Hall on 6 March 1900. The raising of the Bushmen's Corps as reported in the Adelaide Advertiser of 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1901, very publicly involving Carew's father, so the son no doubt was influenced by the father's active interest in military affairs.

At the family winery, young Carew Reynell conscientiously improved the lot of his employees, paying his winery employees above union rates and throwing an annual seaside picnic for the employees and their families. In July 1908 he was commissioned in the militia as 2nd Lieutenant, 16<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, South Australian Mounted Rifles, and rose to the rank of Major.

Joining the Australian Imperial Force as Major 2I/C of the 9<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, he departed from Melbourne on HMAT Karroo (sounds similar to “Carew”) on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1915. His regiment landed at Gallipoli on 21 May 1915. He had been closely involved in pre-war militia mobilisation planning. An excellent leader, he cared for his men and expertly ensured the well-being of his ship-borne horses, using electric fans and rotating through stalls with fresher air. His horse losses en-route were much lower than for other regiments.

His fearless leadership saw him promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on 7<sup>th</sup> August as Officer Commanding after his CO was killed at The Nek. Just 20 days later Carew Reynell himself was killed, leading the charge on Hill 60. He is buried at the Hill 60 Cemetery, Canakkale.

(In 2015, The Australian War Memorial held a series of 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Last Post Ceremonies; see <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10680210> for LTCOL Reynell AIF)

Grief stricken, Carew Reynell's wife, May Marion Reynell (nee Byard) 1882-1967, threw herself into the war effort; she had already established the Wounded Soldiers' Fund and also The League of Loyal Women which organised the dispatch of Christmas Billies to Australia's troops. She went even further (literally) to go to Heliopolis Cairo (now the Cairo International Airport), setting up and running for 6 months a light refreshment room for the Australian troops (including her husband's regiment). She even managed to lay an inscribed iron cross on her husband's Gallipoli grave. Continuing similar support after the war, she became the Reynella Red Cross Branch President, and Secretary/Treasurer of the League of Loyal Women. The Reynella Memorial Hall was opened on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1954 by the SA Premier Tom Playford, with Mrs Carew Reynell turning the key.

In an odd turn of events, during WW2 the Italian merchantman "*Remo*" was captured in Fremantle on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1940, when Mussolini declared war. The Italian crew and Italian male passengers were interred, and the other passengers - Hungarians, Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians, Jugoslavs, Estonians, Finns, and Italian women and children of other nationalities - were transferred to Melbourne. The ship was renamed (under the Australian Flag) the *Reynella*, and used to transport foodstuffs and war materials from Australia to Great Britain. Some of the items on a 1940 run were jams, canned fruits, flour, wheat, tallow, hides and lead. By November 1949, newspapers report the ship had been sold to an Italian company and had returned to its original name *Remo*.



Thus the Reynells had not only a town named after them but also a ship!

Son Richard Carew Reynell grew up in the family estate at Reynella, and followed his father Carew into St Peters College. The Reynella Winery maintained its prominent position in the winemaking business, and doing well enough to send young Richard in 1929 (just 17 years of age) over to successfully sit the Entrance Examination for Balliol College Oxford University (where his father attended) to study viticulture. While nothing can be found out about young Richard's previous interest in aviation, one can surmise he did notice the Oxford University Air Squadron (OUAS) and joined as soon as possible. Indeed, as noted on the RAF Benevolent Fund website "he came to England to study at Oxford but soon joined the OUAS and having discovered his love of flying, abandoned his studies and joined the RAF in 1931"

Richard was already in the OUAS at least by July 1930, evidenced by a group photo in *Flight Magazine* of 1<sup>st</sup> August 1930 - Article on pages 862 & 863 (note RAF members)

He is standing at the far right back row of picture (the "back row" includes the middle row).



O.U.A.S. Names from left to right:—Front row : T. F. Owen, S. H. R. Clarke, F.-Sergt. Freeman, F.O. P. H. Smith, F.O. G. A. V. Tyson, Flight-Lieut. F. J. W. Mellersh, A.F.C., Wing-Comdr. A. G. R. Garrod, M.C., D.F.C., Flight-Lieut. C. Guppy, F.O. E. J. George, F.O. A. E. Dark, F.O. J. W. Duggan, W. A. Welch, A. M. Emmet. Back row : F.-Sergt. Kelly, Sgt. Devson, J. K. W. Alexander, J. H. Lavery, E. A. M. Norie, G. G. Davies, J. W. G. Birkbeck, W. B. Thompson, D. B. Smith, T. F. Bird, T. H. A. Llewellyn, J. M. D. Ker, R. C. Richards, R. Hobbins, J. M. Freeman, R. L. Charlesworth, H. G. Lafleur, B. C. Sharp, C. H. Carter, G. M. T. Kerr, J. F. Platts Mills, R. C. Reynell, P. K. George. (FLIGHT Photo.)

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Also from *Flight Magazine's* RAF Section which published RAF appointments from the London Gazette (with grateful acknowledgement to Craig Hoyle of *Flight Global* magazine):

7<sup>th</sup> April 1931: Reserve of Air Force Officers *General Duties Branch* R. C. Reynell is granted a comm. (commission) in Class A. A. (ii) as Pilot Officer (March 24).

23<sup>rd</sup> October 1931: R. C. Reynell, to No. 5 Flying Training School, Sealand, on appointment to a short service comm., with effect from 28.9.31.

16<sup>th</sup> August 1934: GD (General Duties) Branch: FLGOFF Reynell appointed to No. 43(F) Squadron, Tangmere 1.8.34

20<sup>th</sup> December 1934: GD Branch: FLGOFF R.C. Reynell appointed to Station Flight Duxford 6.12.34 (also noted in GD – WGCCDR K.R. Park M.C.; D.F.C. (that New Zealander); to *Special Duty List*, 6.12.34; on appointment as Air Attache, Buenos Aires, vice Grp. Capt. R. B. Maycock O.B.E. [nice one!])

Steve Larkins (contributor to the Virtual War Memorial Australia [VWMA]) notes that FLTLT Reynell joined 43SQN Tangmere on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1932. 43SQN were equipped with Hawker Furies, and Reynell flew one of the three Furies in their aerobatic team at the Brussels International Air Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1933, where he attracted the attention of the Hawker Aircraft Company.

Hawker Fury K5674 in 43SQN colours. The first 43SQN Fury flew 25<sup>th</sup> March 1931, and retired from RAF Fighter Command in January 1939.



The Fury retired in 1949 (from the Iranian Air Force).

Some further commentary on Reynell as a Test Pilot from Greg Weller, History Group Member of the South Australian Air Museum (SAAM):

“Pursued by Hawker Aircraft Company as a Test Pilot, he transferred to the RAF Reserve as a Reserve Air Force Officer (RAFO) in January 1937, and returned to Australia for a short time before taking up employment with Hawker Aircraft Company”. Already by around 1930, there was disquiet in England over what was happening in Germany, and those with eyes on this believed there was another war coming. University squadrons at the time received considerable support and encouragement from the Government and RAF in the belief that future combat pilots should be highly educated, leadership trained and physically fit – “the right stuff”.

In the pre-war period of heightened tension between Germany and Britain, Dickie was involved in the British government attempts to dissuade Nazi Germany's military expansion throughout Europe by demonstrating British airpower. An account from the RAF Benevolent Fund website indicates the perceived importance of such air shows, and describes Dickie's part in this effort:

“In the pre-war period of heightened tension between Germany and Britain, he (Reynell) was instrumental in government attempts to dissuade Nazi Germany's military expansion throughout Europe by demonstrating the exhilarating performance and capabilities of the new Hawker Hurricane to the 3rd Reich's Air Ministry”. This refers to the Brussels International Air Show of 1939 at Evere.

At the July 1939 Brussels Air Show at Evere, Dickie's exhilarating aerobatic performance of the new Hawker Hurricane *perhaps* gave observer Colonel General Erhard Milch of the 3rd Reich's Air Ministry something to think about – and all this just two months ahead of war being declared by Britain, and just 10 months before Belgium itself was overwhelmed in May 1940..

Another obituary in "Flight" Magazine (31<sup>st</sup> October 1940) describes how he demonstrated the Hurricane at the July 1939 Brussels Air Show before the war to a distinguished audience, including Milch, where his display was an amazing demonstration of the Hurricane's capabilities.

Perhaps the most authoritative account of Dickie's Demo at the July 9, 1939 Evere Air Show comes from Victor Boin, an Air Show reporter whose text below is translated literally from the French. The expression is not anglicised, and is part of the documentation gratefully received from **Charlie de la Royère**, du Brussels Air Museum, Responsable de la Bibliothèque et du Centre de Documentation:

*“England took part in the meeting with nine large 11.5-ton Wellington twin-engine bombers. They will execute, under the command of Wing Commander Lloyd, flights in various formations. These devices are more particularly intended for night raids. The highlight of the meeting was, we believe, the dazzling demonstration of the British reserve lieutenant Reynell, attached to the test department of the Hawker firm. Piloting a single-seat Hurricane fighter with a Rolls Royce 1,050 C.V. engine (an aircraft of which our army has ordered a hundred copies)\*\*, he proved to us the acrobatic capacity of this type of machine. Equipped with a variable-pitch propeller, the monoplane literally jumped off the ground, climbing very high in the sky in a few moments. Its vertical rises including a first, then a second and finally a third barrel, surprised more than one informed spectator. In short, Lieutenant Reynell fired one*

*hundred percent of his machine. According to the English military airmen present, he would have accomplished in this exhibition the most beautiful demonstration of his career.*

**\*\*** In 1939 Belgium bought 20 Hurricane Mk.I's being early models with fabric covered wings and a *fixed* 2-blade propeller, and a licence to build 80 more, of which only two were completed. Most of the aircraft were bombed in the German invasion ten months later on 10 May 1940 at the Schaffen military airfield. Some 29 Belgian pilots did escape to Britain to fight again.

*Three Hurricanes, piloted by Captain Rucquoi and Adjutants Claert and Verlinden, then took off and then flew over the aerodrome at low altitude, passing each other at full throttle in front of the stands. Big impression too!*

*But here is another British presentation. It is the one, made by Flight Lieutenant Reynell of a single-seater Hawker Hurricane fighter, the latest combat equipment chosen by our Military Aeronautics. This presentation is great. Made in a perfect way, by always remaining above the ground, it has, for the first time, shown to the Belgian public the qualities of speed and maneuverability of a completely modern type of formula combat device. Spades, followed by almost vertical taper resources ending in one or two barrels made a huge sensation. Belgium has acquired a material of choice. This impression was confirmed by the peleton presentations made by Captain Rucquoi and the adjutants Claert and Verlinden of 3 Hurricanes, making low-level passages, the 2 wing planes crossing each other at full speed in front of the stands. “*

Another sensational press report found by Steve Larkins for Dickie's performance that day:

*“Hardened Belgian pilots on the balcony of the Brussels Flying Club danced with joy when they saw him doing those vertical climbs, slowly revolving on his longitudinal axis. Much alarm was caused when, during the long, straight dive with which Reynell begins these rocket-like upward flights, flames were seen to be issuing apparently from the cowling and licking along the side of the machine. People shouted: 'Il pritfeu!' (it is on fire) but the machine went on.*

*I later learned the flames were caused by an accumulation of super-rich mixture shooting out of the exhaust ports in a long flame.”*

A journalist for the popular journal *Aeroplane* also wrote: “Flight-Lieut Reynell and a Hawker Hurricane was the best ever aerobatic display at the Brussels Air Show. He did everything with the machine which a Hurricane could reasonably be expected to do, and then some more. With all due respect to all the other brilliant aerobats of the afternoon, there is no doubt that Reynell stole the show.”

Courtesy of Charlie de la Royère, what follows are pictures and words from the July 1939 Air Show. While only a small amount is of direct connection to Dickie Reynell, the material is relevant to the strategic environment of the time. Many of the soon-to-be protagonists present would have been taking notes and photographs for their air ministries, and “diplomatically” eyeing each other off.

## From Charlie de la Royère

Responsable de la Bibliothèque et du Centre de Documentation du Brussels Air Museum:

Air Show Programme extract -Page 26 - Charlie notes that FLTLT Reynell replaces FLTLT Smalley.

“Vol en echelon refuse vers la droite” literally Step flight refused to the right; “Sous-officiers pilotes” are non-commissioned pilots.

The rest of the programme would be quite fascinating to see, such as the *Luftwaffe* Stuka demonstration. “Pologne” ie Poland made an appearance. Just over 7 weeks later -1<sup>st</sup> September 1939- the Poles would be desperately fighting the Germans. A total of 145 experienced and battle-hardened Polish airmen fought in the Battle of Britain - 79 airmen in various RAF squadrons, 32 in No. 302 (Polish) Fighter Squadron and 34 in No. 303 (Polish) Fighter Squadron.

With war imminent, we can readily those imagined recollections of the Great War, “finished” just 21 years earlier, in the minds of those at the Air Show.

**d) Vol en échelon refusé vers la droite.**

**EQUIPAGES :**      **Officiers pilotes :**

<i>Wing Commander</i> H. P. LLOYD	D. B. ALLISON
<i>Squadron Leader</i> R.A.A. COLE	J. P. C. ROLT
<i>Squadron Leader</i> L. S. LAMB	J. R. T. SMALLEY
<i>Flight Lieutenant</i>	C. R. C. HOWLETT
E. P. W. HUTTON	H. ROSOFSKY
I. P. GRANT	D. C. E. BAILEY
P. E. TORKINGTON-	P. C. LAMBERT
LEECH	

**Sous-officiers pilotes :**

I. E. M. BORLEY	W. HAMMOND
A. FEARNSIDE	J. RAMSHAW
F. BARBER	C. BOWEN
A. TURNER	

DEPART : *Evere.*  
ATTERRISSAGE : *Evere.*

**9**

**SUISSE**

**Peloton de 3 avions biplaces C.35.**

**EQUIPAGES :**    *Capitaine* SCHLEGEL.  
                  *Capitaine* THIEBAUD.  
                  1<sup>er</sup> *Lieut. de* POURTALES.

DEPART : *Evere.*  
ATTERRISSAGE : *Evere.*

**10**

**BELGIQUE**

**Présentation d'un peloton de 3 HURRICANE.**

a) **Passage en vitesse en formation ;**  
b) **Passage individuel.**

**EQUIPAGES :**    *Capitaine* RUCQUIOI.  
                  *Adjudant* CLAERT.  
                  *Adjudant* VERLINDEN.

DEPART : *Evere.*  
ATTERRISSAGE : *Evere.*

**11**

**POLOGNE :**

**Escadrille de 7 avions bimoteurs LOS.**

## The Luftwaffe “Show and Tell” at the July 1939 Brussels Air Show



Literal Translation (via Google): “During his visit to the Show, HM the King of Belgium was keen on the Jumo 205 fuel burning engine\*, exhibited at the very important stand of the Junkers firm. The King had the operation and qualities of this engine explained to him by the general representative, M. Griser.” (M. Grisar is perhaps a civilian Junkers test pilot in the Junkers company pilot uniform? Or *Luftwaffe*?)

“The top photo gives a general view of the stand in the centre of which one can admire the peak bombing plane, the Junkers JU 87 (Stuka) with engine Jumo 211\*\* which was presented in flight on Tuesday July 18, at the aerodrome of Brussels, if that strongly impressed the personalities presented by its masterful evolutions.” (Impressions to be reinforced in May 1941, just 10 months later).

\* Jumo 205 diesel engine powered earlier versions of the twin-engine Ju-86 bomber

\*\* Jumo 211 direct injection, 12 cyl, 60° inverted V supercharged liquid-cooled, 34.97 litre, 640kg

## The Anglaise "Show and Tell" at the 1939 Brussels Air Show

Literal Translations (via Google Translate):

**Fairey:** The great English firm which, for years, has provided important equipment to the Belgian Military Aviation, presented the small, fast two-seater Fairey P.4 for chase and dive bombing. A similar type has been ordered by the Navy.

**Hawker:** This fighter plane (Hurricane) is of the same type as the one which has just been ordered by the Belgian Military Aviation. About twenty will be supplied by the English firm and eighty will be built, under license, in Belgian factories.

**Vickers:** This firm presents the Spitfire, the fastest fighter plane in service with the British Air Force. The aircraft on display is a special aircraft destined to soon break the world record.

**De Havilland:** This firm, whose reputation is worldwide, presents the small Moth Minor economic passenger plane, very easy to handle and offering the greatest safety. (The 2-seater DH94 manufacture was relocated to de Havilland Australia Bankstown at the outbreak of the war).

**Vickers Wellington :** This firm presents its bomber which is the most important Aircraft of the Show.



**LA PARTICIPATION ANGLAISE**

**FAIREY**

La grande firme anglaise qui, depuis des années, a fourni un matériel important à l'Aviation militaire belge, présentait le petit Fairey « P. 4 » biplace rapide pour la chasse et le bombardement en piqué. Un type similaire a été commandé par la Marine danoise.

**HAWKER**

Cet avion de chasse est du même type que celui qui vient d'être commandé par l'Aviation militaire belge. Une vingtaine sera fournie par la firme anglaise et quatre-vingts seront construits, sous licence, dans des usines belges.

**VICKERS**

Cette firme présente le « Spitfire », l'avion de chasse le plus rapide en service dans l'Aviation militaire anglaise. L'avion exposé est un avion spécial destiné à battre le record du monde prochainement.

**DE HAVILLAND**

Cette firme, dont la renommée est mondiale, présente le petit biplace « Moth Minor », avion de tourisme économique, très maniable et offrant la plus grande sécurité.

**VICKERS WELLINGTON**

Cette firme présente son bombardier qui est l'avion le plus important du Salon.

**Général Aircraft**

Présente un petit avion d'entraînement côte à côte et con-

To diverge: A Brief Appearance in Australia of the Junkers Ju-86, carrying passengers not bombs -

From <https://aeropedia.com.au/content/junkers-ju-86/>

“On 15 March 1937 Mr E F R Beinssen took delivery of a Ju 86Z-1 (export designation for the Ju 86C-1) (c/n 86-0952 – VH-UYA – ex D-AGEY) “for re-sale for commercial purposes”. The aircraft was built in 1937 at Dessau and was described as a “Ju 86B



Australien”. On arrival at Darwin, NT, whilst taxiing to the terminal, the port engine failed due to the roller bearings of the blower shaft, which ran at 18,000 rpm (fast!), jamming, causing the bearing housing to burst and allowing the front bearing to also fail. A spare engine was shipped from Germany, arriving in April 1937, and the aircraft proceeded to Melbourne, VIC on 24 April for evaluation by a number of Australian airlines.”

“On 26 April a provisional Certificate of Airworthiness was issued and the aircraft, named ‘*Lawrence Hargrave*’, flew to Charleville and Brisbane in Queensland. On 14 May it flew to Cootamundra, NSW where it was to commence charter services with Airlines of Australia. On 17 May it departed Sydney, NSW for Brisbane at 8.05 am, arriving at 11 am, a flying time of 2 hrs 40 mins for the 821 km (510 miles). The aircraft continued to Townsville, QLD with a full complement of passengers. On 20 May it left Brisbane for a service to Sydney but near Coffs Harbour, NSW the starboard engine failed about 16 km (11 miles) from the airport. The aircraft landed safely but the engine was badly damaged and another engine was shipped from Melbourne, the passengers continuing their journey on board a Stinson Model A.”

“The spare engine was installed and the aircraft was flown to Melbourne. No orders for the type were forthcoming in Australia. The aircraft was dismantled and shipped back to Germany on 25 August 1937 on board the ‘*SS Lippe*’. It was officially struck off the register on 26 September that year. In Germany it again became D-AGEY, still with the name ‘*Lawrence Hargrave*’, and the tails were painted red with black swastikas. This eventually became the personal aircraft of Junkers director, Heinrich Koppenberg, registered as D-ARJF and renamed ‘*Heerbert Norkus*’ before being operated by the Luftwaffe in the transport role with the code DD + VL. The Ju 86 was perhaps ahead of its time and its achilles heel was the unreliability of the diesel engines. The aircraft had Sperry blind-flying equipment, duplicated altimeters, Telefunken radio, quietness of operation, and “luxurious seats” and a “lavatory” for the ten passengers. At one stage in December 1936 Southern Airlines and Freighters proposed operating services between Adelaide and Melbourne using seven Ju 86s with diesel engines but none were imported.”

(“Southern Airlines and Freighters” has so far eluded rediscovery).

While there is a wealth of material on various websites, nothing technical has come to light regarding Dickie's period as a test pilot for the Hawker company (founded by Harry Hawker, an Australian; Moorabbin Airport now bears his name). A single account from an Adelaide Advertiser journalist writing an obituary relates how "he flew a Hurricane single-handed as the other hand was holding a camera, to take photographs of an "experimental aircraft" immediately above him, to record the movement of wool tufts attached to various surfaces, including the radiator inlet". Steady hands ...

Dickie was not a 'show off' pilot but was a consummate professional, who believed in doing everything well. He possessed a great technical knowledge of his aircraft, and in short he was the perfect test pilot. By the time the WW2 began, he was at age 27 one of the RAF's most experienced He started 9 years earlier in 1930 with the OUAS, followed by appointment into the RAF Reserve Air Force Officer (RAFO), and later secondment into Hawker as a test pilot and finally to 43 Squadron Tangmere, where on 2<sup>nd</sup> September he claimed one Bf109 and several probables.

### **A Last Photograph of His Last Day**



FLTLT Richard (Dickie) Reynell, seated second from the right of picture, with other 43SQN aircrew relaxing at the Officers Mess Tangmere on September 7<sup>th</sup>, only hours before his doomed aerial engagement. That day 43 SQN lost two Hurricanes, with overall losses of 18 Hurricanes and 10 Spitfires of Fighter Command headed by the New Zealander AVM Keith Park.

With the start of World War 2 in September 1939, he re-joined the RAF and was to be seconded back to Hawker to continue his test pilot duties. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> he was attached to No 43 SQN, his original squadron, for operational experience at RAF Tangmere, in the middle of the Battle of Britain. Indeed, the station had just endured a devastating attack on 16 August 1940 when hundreds of Stuka dive bombers and fighters crossed the English coast and attacked Tangmere. There was extensive damage to buildings and aircraft on the ground and 14 ground staff and six civilians were killed, but the station

was kept in service and brought back into full operation. During the next two weeks Reynell claimed one Me109 fighter destroyed and several probable while undertaking combat air patrols from Tangmere. On 6 September, Reynell was ordered back to Hawker on the 7th to replace a pilot who had just been killed. He decided to complete the next day's flying operations before returning to Hawker.

In June 2013, at the ceremony and unveiling of the Point Hill Park Memorial by the Shoreham (Kent) Aircraft Museum curator Geoff Nutkins said: "Dickie (Richard) Reynell was not just another of the brave "Few" - he was a real person, undoubtedly brave, with an interesting past, who died doing the job he loved and who perished helping to defend my city and furthermore, defending my local neighbourhood." The Shoreham folks are dedicated to establishing memorials across the UK to downed RAF pilots as close as possible to their crash sites.

Those attending the ceremony included Shoreham Air Museum members, several Reynell family members, Wing Commander Anthony (Tony) O'Leary OAM RAAF (UK Assistant Defence Advisor), family friend Andrew Rennie, who delivered an account of Richard's last sortie. David Caillard (RAF retired), a great nephew of Dickie Reynell, told more of the story, including Dickie's contribution at Hawkers in the development of the RAF's first monoplane fighter – the Hurricane.

An account published in the UK, by researcher Andrew Rennie, reportedly compiling a book on Richard Reynell, says of his final moments;

*Richard attacked the bombers with his Squadron Leader all the way from Beachy Head to London. At approximately 5.00 PM he was shot down over Greenwich. Dickie Reynell did not bail out but was blown out of his Hurricane. The Hurricane (Mk 1 FT-F V7257) itself was blown into three pieces with the engine going through the roof of St Ursula's Convent which set the building on fire.*

His parachute was unopened, he fell into the garden of a house in the suburb of Blackheath. According to a declassified casualty report that Steve Hunnisett (of "Blitzwalkers" London) has read, "life was extinct and the body was removed to the Royal Herbert Military Hospital, Woolwich".

Dickie's body was discovered in the garden at 3 Kidbrooke Grove, which was incidentally the residence of Commander HP Mead RN, who happened to be at home at the time of the incident. Dickie appeared to have been wounded in the chest and had crashed through a garden bench when he hit the ground. According to the report "*Life was extinct and the body was removed to the Royal Herbert Military Hospital, Woolwich.*" (Source – Steve Hunnisett of "Blitzwalkers" London).

A more detailed account of the aerial events of September 7 and 43 Squadron operations derives from websites [battleofbritain1940.net/0037.html](http://battleofbritain1940.net/0037.html) (includes Fighter Command Combat Report 7.9.1940), [military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Caesar\\_Hull](http://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Caesar_Hull) and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar\\_Hull](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar_Hull) :

"Around 16:00 on 7 September 1940, 43 Squadron at Folkestone was scrambled with nine Hurricanes to intercept a large formation of German aircraft coming over Kent towards London. 43 Squadron had been one of the first squadrons to take off with Squadron Leader C.B. "Caesar" Hull from Rhodesia (an ace) leading with FLTLT Richard "Dick" Reynell and four other Hurricanes to intercept the bombers.

FLTLT John “Killy” Kilmartin from Ireland led the two other Hurricanes to intercept the enemy fighters. By all accounts, the controller had the squadron flying all over the place.”

“They spot about thirty Do17s with an escort of over eighty Bf109s. SQNLDR Hull instructs FLTLT Kilmartin to engage the escort while FLTLT Reynell and himself attack the Dorniers. They climb until they are some 1,500 feet above the enemy, and as Kilmartin continues the climb towards the Bf109s, Hull and Reynell take their sections down approaching the bombers from astern and each aircraft firing all Brownings. Then as the Dorniers take evasive action each of the Hurricanes pick out its individual target. They weave in and out of the enemy formation as it makes its way across the countryside of Kent, a couple of Do17s fall victims, but Kilmartin’s section is not having the best of luck as they are hopelessly outnumbered and many of the Bf109s continue to protect the bombers. At 1645hrs as they were approaching South London, two Bf109s come down on both Caesar Hull and Dick Reynell. The Squadron Leader takes a hit and his Hurricane goes out of control, spiralling earthwards but there is no sign of the pilot baling out, finally crashing into the grounds of Purley Boys’ High School near Croydon. Dick Reynell also takes a hit and a long tail of smoke bellows behind the stricken aircraft. Dick manages to get out of the cockpit and jumps moments before the Hurricane explodes into flames, but his parachute fails to open. His aircraft crashes just south of Woolwich and Dick Reynell, believed to have been wounded in the attack and may have lost consciousness as he jumped, and this could have been the reason for his chute failing to open. His body crashed to the ground at Blackheath.”

Dickie’s wartime flying also included the (brief) Battle for France which immediately preceded the Battle of Britain. He was already credited with at least one kill and several probables.

Dickie was “not supposed” to fly this 7<sup>th</sup> day in September, having been just ordered by the RAF back to Hawkers where he had been one of the principal Hurricane test pilots. A Hawker test pilot had just been killed, and a replacement was urgently needed. Instead of hopping on the train to Hawkers, he chose to do one last combat mission before returning to Hawkers. He conducted an airframe/engine test on his repaired Hurricane V7257 following damage in the previous day’s combat, completing the test flight by beating up the length of the airfield in a continuous barrel roll with contrails from the wingtips forming a twisted vapour trail behind him which left ground crews awe struck.” (ref: RAF Benevolent Fund website <https://www.rafbf.org/news-and-stories/news/memorial-stone-unveiled-commemorate-brave-world-war-ii-pilot>)

At first glance taking a highly experienced and battle experienced pilot such as Dickie Reynell off operations, especially at this stage of the war, where the Luftwaffe’s principal target was still thought to be the RAF itself, to return to being a test pilot may seem odd. However, aircraft modifications were being applied as rapidly as possible by both sides, and these required rigorous flight testing before implementation. This work was urgent as any improvement in performance and weaponry could tip the balance in combat.

One example of the need for modifications: When attacking *Luftwaffe* bombers such as the Heinkels and Dorniers, Hurricane pilots quickly found their fuel tanks were vulnerable to defensive machine gun fire. For the Hurricane, the greatest hazard was with the unprotected gravity-feed fuel tank in front of the cockpit which could rupture when hit, allowing a jet of flame to penetrate the cockpit through the instrument panel, causing serious burn injuries to the pilot, made unimaginably worse at 3000 degrees if, as many did, flew with hatch open (a throwback to open-cockpit flying). The wooden and fabric rear fuselage was also far more likely to catch fire from ejected fuel from punctured tanks than the metal fuselages of its contemporaries. This issue was of such concern to Air Marshal Dowding that he had Hawker retrofit the fuselage tanks of Hurricanes with a fire-resistant material called "Linatex" as a matter of priority. The wing tanks were fitted with a covering of this sealant, but the fuselage tank which fed the engine, was, incredibly, considered to be too small a target (!!). In one month of combat, 10 July 1940 to 11 August, defensive fire from bombers hit 25 Hurricanes and 25 Spitfires; as a result 11 Hurricanes were shot down compared with two Spitfires.

On the other side at this time, the Heinkel He111 had seven MG 15 7.92 mm machine guns (2 nose, 1 dorsal, 2 on sides, 2 ventral) designed specifically as a hand manipulated, defensive, flexible mount, combat aircraft for the use of, during the early 1930s. The 75-round drum could be emptied in 4.5 seconds. Experienced and very quick-thinking RAF fighter pilots could take deadly advantage of the few seconds a gunner required to load a new magazine. By 1941 the MG15 was replaced by other types and found new uses with ground troops.

ref: [http://www.warbirdsresourcegroup.org/LRG/luftwaffe\\_barrel\\_armaments\\_mg15.html](http://www.warbirdsresourcegroup.org/LRG/luftwaffe_barrel_armaments_mg15.html)

While of little comfort, the Hurricane could withstand heavy incoming fire, and even cannon shells would often simply pass through the "rag and wood" Hurricane fuselage, and if the aircraft survived its battle damage, repairs were relatively easy and quick. The all-metal Spitfire however would suffer badly by comparison, requiring considerable time, effort and skill to repair metal-skinned surfaces and metal airframes.

### **Some Background to The Blitz and The Blitz Start Date**

The London Blitz started on 7<sup>th</sup> September with the Luftwaffe bombing London as ordered by Hitler in response to Churchill's revenge night RAF raid on Berlin on 26<sup>th</sup> of August, in turn triggered by the Luftwaffe raid over London the night before. There still remains controversy over whether the latter was unintended due to navigation errors, or planned. Bombs fell as far west as Staines and Esher – about 120 kms west of the primary targets - the fuel farms and docks at the Thames Estuary - and about 60 kms west of the London East End dockyard facilities. While analysing what might have gone wrong is futile, one could ask about the why some bombs fell so far to the west. Assuming a cruise speed of 300 kph for a Dornier Do-17, 120 kms would be about 24 minutes flying time, and the faster cruise speed of the Junkers Ju-88 of 370 kph reducing that time to 20 minutes, with the Heinkel He-111 in between.

London would be about half-way, and 10 minutes beyond London, readily spotted at night by tracking the Thames River (map to ground), competent navigators might be thinking "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot".

An analysis of the “accidental” bombing of London 24<sup>th</sup> August 1940 can be found via The Battle of Britain Historical Society at <https://www.battleofbritain1940.net/0029.html> and is worth reading.

Perhaps not so well-known is that the RAF’s August 26 air raid over Berlin was not the first to hit Berlin in WW2. The French went in first, at midnight on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1940 with an antiquated but long-range French Farman 233 aircraft - the *Jules Verne* NC 2234, featuring push-pull engines. The *Jules Verne* flew over the brilliantly illuminated Tempelhof aerodrome approaching as if for a landing. Instead they overflew at low altitude to drop bombs and incendiaries on the Siemens-Werke factory at Tegel about 12 kms further on. They had unexpectedly flew in, not from the west, but via Denmark from the north, managed to evade the flak, and landing exhausted some 13 hours later at Paris Orly on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

They barely had time to service the aircraft and get some sleep before new orders arrived. On the night of June 10-11, they followed practically the same route along the coast, again crossed over southern Denmark and flew out over the Baltic. The target this time was near the coast: the Heinkel factory at Rostock. Again the *Jules Verne* vanished into the night and returned safely. Two days later it bombed an industrial complex south of Venice, and the next night an oil refinery near Livorno. During both of those missions, the crew dropped propaganda leaflets on Rome.

Painting by Ray Grinnel



(source: <https://www.historynet.com/target-berlin-the-first-air-raid-on-the-german-capital.htm>)

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, the German Propaganda Ministry stated that an air raid drill had been held the night before. News of a real raid was suppressed because an air attack on the capital would have embarrassed Adolf Hitler and especially Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, the latter bragging before the war that if that happened he would change his name. Accounts of this new name vary between Maier and Meyer – the latter apparently appertaining to an ass. From 1941 bomb-weary Berliners would refer to him, *sotto voce* one imagines, as “Herr Meyer”.

The Battle of France lasted just six weeks, and on 21st June, armistice negotiations with France formally concluded with effect on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Hitler and his entourage had already been photographed in front of the Eiffel Tower on Sunday, June 23.

The revenge targeting of London and its sprawling docks (in response to an RAF night raid on Berlin itself on 25/26 August 1940, triggered by that Luftwaffe night raid over London on 24/25 August) was Hitler’s big mistake, giving time for the RAF to restore their crews, aircraft and airfields and thus increase their rate of effort. The losses subsequently inflicted by the RAF on the Luftwaffe meant that air power superiority was now with the RAF over southern England, resulting in Hitler’s Operation Sea Lion invasion being “delayed” – and finally abandoned.

Dickie Reynell saw his last action on what was to become the first day of the London Blitz, and the beginning of the pivot.

He is laid to rest at the Brookwood Military Cemetery, Pirbright, Surrey, Grave 202417. His memorial below is alongside his twice widowed wife Marjorie Horn (died in July 2006 in Spain) and their son John Richard Carew Reynell (died 1<sup>st</sup> August 1973, helicopter accident, Malaysia).



Richard and Marjorie were married for a tragically short time – two weeks short of two years. Their son John was 15 months old when Richard was killed.

Earlier, joyous news did appear in the Adelaide Advertiser 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1938 - "Adelaide Man Engaged in London: The engagement is announced of Richard, son of the late Colonel Carew Reynell, of Reynella South Australia, to Marjorie, daughter of Colonel Watts-Allen". One could imagine Richard's mother in Reynella alerting the Adelaide Advertiser.

And a later announcement: The wedding of Mr. Richard Carew Reynell, only son of the late Col. Carew Reynell and Mrs. Reynell, of Reynella, South Australia, and Miss Enid Marjorie Allen, second daughter of Col. And Mrs. E. Watts Allen, of Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, took place at St. Giles's Church, Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, England, on September 24 1938.

Author's notes:

To date, the author hasn't been successful in locating records of Dickie's test flights at Hawkers, which would make for interesting reading. Other loose ends are a'plenty, including contacting Arthur Rennie, WGCDR Tony O'Leary, and any of those Reynell family members (such as David Caillard) who attended the Point Hill Park commemoration, and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration at the Australian War Memorial for LTCOL Carew Reynell KIA August 1916 at The Nek. Deadline time has caught up with me. If anyone reading this article can provide me with any leads, I would be most appreciative.

Finally, I have tried to ensure the accuracy of content, occasionally tricky with various accounts, and I'll be very grateful for any corrections and suggestions – this whole story I feel still has some way to go.

Carl Dillon  
AFA (Vic)