

Finding Kenneth Holland: Waverley's Battle of Britain Spitfire Pilot



Kenneth Holland c. late 1930s

The Battle of Britain occurred over the skies of Southern England in 1940. It lasted four months and involved pilots from at least twenty different countries. In British history it ranks along side Waterloo and Trafalgar in its significance.

It was the strangest of conflicts unlike previous air battles in the second war there was not a land battle going on at the same time.

The British Population watched as pilots fought in the skies above them. Planes crashed and people died but life went on. In the evening it was not unusual for Allied pilots to go down the pub.

Over 540 Allied pilots died in the conflict which delivered the first major defeat to German armed forces during the Second World War and prevented the invasion of Britain. The heavily outnumbered Allied pilots become known as *The Few* as they were described in Winston Churchill's famous war time speech.

There were at least 30 pilots and air crew who fought in the Battle of Britain with an Australian connection. Kenneth Christopher Holland was the 10th Australian casualty to be killed in action and at twenty years old the youngest. His involvement in one of the most significant battles of the Second World War was quite by chance. Born in Sydney in 1920 Kenneth Holland grew up in the Waverley area.

His father was from Cowra and met his Wife Ina at Weymouth in England during the First World War whilst serving with the Australian Imperial forces. They moved back to Australia in 1919. On return his father Harold Holland was medically discharged from the AIF suffering from 'shell shock'. Records indicate that by 1923 they were living in the Bondi area.

Kenneth Holland grew up in a suburb that was changing rapidly. Beach culture was taking off marked by the opening of the Bondi Pavilion 1929. Holland went rock fishing along the coast and attended the Intermediate High school at Randwick. At 15 he applied to join Tamarama Surf Life Saving club just down the road from his home in Wonderland Avenue, Tamarama.

His membership application lists his occupation as a student. During his time at the club he would have met Hugh Ripley a wealthy business man who was engaged in a market gardening business in the Sydney area. At some stage during 1935 Ripley invited Holland to accompany him on his next trip back to England. This was no ordinary invitation. Hugh Ripley offered to sponsor Holland to attend an aviation Engineering college at the Airspeed Company in Portsmouth.

The course was developed and coordinated by Neville Shute Norway, later to become a famous author and Australian resident. When not at College Holland lived with Ripley in a farmhouse near Camelford on the North coast of Cornwall. At the end of 1936 he made a trip back to Australia. During his stay he passed his bronze surf life saving Medallion at Tamarama Surf Life Saving Club.

During 1936 the British Government announced a major expansion of the Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF Volunteer Reserve was formed to provide flying lessons for any suitable candidate to learn to fly at weekends. Holland joined the RAFVR in a round 1938.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 Holland was called up fulltime into the ranks of the RAF for pilot training. He was posted to Perth in Scotland for pilot training in Tiger moth bi planes. During this time he assessed as being suitable for fighter pilot training. Only one in four trainee pilots were selected.

In June 1940 he was posted to 152 squadron at Ackrington in Northern England. On 10 July 1940 the squadron were posted south two days before the Battle of Britain commenced. They were directed to defend the Portland /Weymouth area and defend channel shipping.

Life at Warmwell during the Battle of Britain would have been tense. The Airfield was attacked on a number of occasions. Pilots would be reported missing or killed in action on a daily basis. Squadron records show that Holland took part in a number of actions during September and that he was responsible for the destruction of at least 3 enemy aircraft.

Kenneth Holland was killed on 25 September whilst attacking German bombers planes returning from bombing Bristol. According to combat reports he was involved in shooting down a German bomber, but was hit by return fire. He crashed at Woolverton behind the church next to the bomber he just shot down.

He was cremated on 2 October 1940 at Weymouth. His ashes were removed by Hugh Ripley on the same day. There is some mystery to where the ashes might have ended up. The most likely scenario is that Ripley kept them until his death in 1964 in South Africa. If that is the case it is likely that they were buried with him.

There are a number of memorials for Kenneth Holland, however our local Waverley one is inside the Tamarama Surf life saving club. He is also listed on the Roll of Honour at the War Memorial in Canberra. In England there is memorial at Tintagel church in Cornwall, and at Weymouth Crematorium. He is also listed on the Battle of Britain monument in London. The Woolverton Memorial is on the side of the A36 12 miles South East from the City of Bath.