

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

PILOT OFFICER WILLIAM HENRY 'TERRIER' MILLINGTON DFC

Fighter Ace and last Australian aircrew to die in the Battle of Britain.



Pilot Officer William Henry 'Terrier' Millington was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 11 August 1917. In 1926, on his 9th birthday, Bill, his mother Elizabeth and his four sisters, arrived at Adelaide onboard the SS *Balranald*. The family had followed Bill's father, William Henry Millington Senior, who due to ill health, had left England earlier in 1926, after his doctor recommended a warm climate with dry air.

After living briefly in Adelaide suburbs Woodville and Millswood, the family purchased and moved into their own home at Edwardstown in March 1927. Bill attended Westbourne Park and Edwardstown Primary Schools and in 1930 enrolled at Adelaide Technical High School. After attaining Intermediate standard in 1931, passing six subjects and ranked 20th on the school merit list, and at the age of 14, he began working at Gilbert Engineering. However, in February 1932, at the insistence of his headmaster at Adelaide Technical High School that he maintain his studies, Bill commenced the school's special guidance program. Bill later left Gilbert Engineering and was then employed as a commercial traveler at G & R Wills & Co Ltd, a major soft goods wholesaler in SA.

Bill's sister Eileen recalled him always wanting to fly and him regularly insisting he would join the Air Force and make a career out of flying. However, his father would not give his permission for Bill, who was then still underage, to take flying lessons. Bill continued his involvement with scouting and playing soccer and he joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserves, as a cadet, on his 18th birthday, later serving in the Signals Branch.

Around the time of his 21st birthday, realising war was imminent and wanting to do his part, Bill applied for an RAAF Cadetship but was unsuccessful. Deciding to go to England and join the RAF and while saving for his passage, Bill sat for and passed his paymaster's exam but nearly failed a medical due to the poor state of his teeth. After getting his teeth fixed, Bill waited for an offer of a commission as a sub-lieutenant with the Naval Reserve.

Believing he could combine a career in the air while being part of the Royal Navy, Bill entertained the idea of joining the Fleet Air Arm. To assist that goal, Bill, who was now 21 and no longer needed his father's permission, joined the Royal Aero Club of South Australia and commenced taking flying lessons at Parafield. Lessons were expensive and by the end of 1938, he had only achieved 5 hours and 15 minutes of dual instruction on Moths. In January 1939, he had only accrued an additional 2 hours and 50 minutes and abandoned his lessons early that year.

Having still not saved enough for his passage to England, Bill's mother helped him with the rest and Bill returned to England in June 1939. On his arrival in London, Bill's immediate hopes of joining the Fleet Air Arm were shattered because his training could not start until November 1939 and his limited funds would soon run out. It was suggested to him that he consider joining the RAF instead.

On 23 June 1939, an interview with the RAF Board went well, he passed his medical and he was granted a short service commission. He was one of only two applicants that were accepted for pilot training that day. Bill later told his sister Eileen, 'After 12 months, I'll probably be transferred to the Fleet Air Arm.'

Bill began his initial eight weeks of training at 8 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School at Reading on 24 July 1939. On his arrival, he flew 36 minutes in a two-seater Miles Hawk low-wing monoplane and another 80 minutes the following day, practising take-offs, landings, and circuits. After soloing in early August, Bill began chasing the 25 hours dual and 25 hours solo he would need to complete the course.

Bill completed his elementary flying training on 16 September 1939. After some leave at the end of the month, he was posted to 10 Flying Training School, Tern Hill, Shropshire, arriving there on 7 October 1939. Lectures began the next day and the Chief Flying Instructor allotted trainees to either bombers or fighters. On 10 October, Bill had his first dual instruction on Harvards, which he found to be a giant compared to Tiger Moths, but he had no problem flying them. This was highlighted by the fact that two days after his first Harvard flight and with only three hours of dual instruction, he soloed in a Harvard. On 21 October 1939, only 11 days after his first Harvard flight, Bill broke a training squadron altitude record by attaining 18,000 feet.

His intermediate training flying at Tern Hill was only marred by one mishap. On 25 November 1939, he landed Harvard N7030 with the undercarriage retracted, causing 'little damage except to airscrew.' At the conclusion of his intermediate training, he scored 86% in armament and 90% in signals, but only 57% in airmanship. Overall, with an average of 71%, he came 22nd out of 29, coming just below the average of 73.5%



Bill Millington after receiving his wings, so post
20 April 1940. Image: origin unknown.

Following a period of leave over Christmas 1939, Bill returned to Tern Hill on 30 December 1939, this time for advanced training. With a severe winter that year, there was little flying training carried out during January and February 1940, with all but essential flights discontinued. Bill was one of many volunteers digging out stranded Harvards in early 1940. Bill's advanced training concluded on 10 April 1940. He improved on his intermediate course results, passing out 14th out of 29, with an average of 75%, putting him just above the course average of 74%. His final assessment for qualities of an officer was 78%, which was above the course average of 75%. His qualities as a pilot were right on the average at 74%.

On 20 April 1940, Bill Millington was confirmed as a Pilot Officer on probation and posted to 17 Operational Training Unit at RAF Upwood in Cambridgeshire. Although Bill had completed advanced fighter training, 17 OTU was a bomber training school, equipped with Blenheims and Ansons. Whatever the reason was for his posting to 17 OTU for bomber training, on 1 June 1940, Bill was posted to 6 Operational Training Unit, Sutton Bridge, Lincolnshire, for conversion to Hurricanes. Sixteen days later, he was posted, as a replacement for a pilot who had been lost in France, to 79 Squadron at RAF Biggin Hill, which was an important 11 Group sector station near London. He was now a fighter pilot! Bill spent his first few days at Biggin Hill familiarising himself with the local area and building up flying hours in Hurricanes.

After the retreat and evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from France in June 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered a famous speech in the House of Commons on 18 June 1940, which included the words:

*'The Battle of France is over. I expect the Battle of Britain is about to begin
.... Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war.'*

Bill's first operational sortie as a fighter pilot took place on 27 June 1940. At 8:35 AM, 79 Squadron took off from Biggin Hill, to travel to RAF Manston in Kent, where they met up with 32 Squadron and then escorted six Blenheims, which were flying a photographic reconnaissance mission to Saint-Valery-sur-Somme and Berck-sur-Mer in northern France. The outward flight was incident free, but when departing the French coast, Pilot Officer Thomas Parker observed three Bf109s behind them. He tried to warn the others but could not be heard over the radio telephone. Bill survived the battle that followed but Flight Lieutenant James Davies plunged into the water about 10 miles off Le Touquet and Sergeant Ronald McQueen, who bailed out of a burning Hurricane, was dead when picked up by a lifeboat. His first experience of battle and the death of two new friends made Bill realise 'the possibility of a hasty departure from this life is ever present.'

On 2 July 1940, 79 Squadron moved to the closest airfield to the French coast at RAF Hawkinge in Kent. Bill carried out a number of sorties in the first week of July but did not encounter any enemy aircraft.

On 7 July 1940, Bill and his friends were 'absolutely fighting mad' at the loss of their friend and Squadron Leader, John Joslin. However, their fury against the Germans was misplaced because 24-year-old Canadian Squadron Leader Joslin had actually been shot down by Spitfires. On a sortie on 8 July 1940, two further 79 Squadron members were killed in action. Bill was on the same sortie but returned unharmed.

The following is quoted from a letter Bill wrote to his parents that was published in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 18 October 1940, he had written about his early experiences in the air fighting over England:

According to the press, Australia is doing its utmost to help the war effort, and no effort must be spared to help Britain to gain a decisive victory, he says. Britain stands united, and behind a typical fighting government she will undoubtedly win through in the end. whatever the cost.

There is no personal hatred of the Germans. Some of the fellows who have been captured have spent some time in the officers' mess before being dispatched to internment camps, and they have proved quite good types, but absolutely fanatical in their belief in Nazism. Having been shaken up considerably by the loss of comrades and

friends, I realise that fighting in the air has to be a cold matter of business routine, no longer sportive. Sorry in a way, but the war has to be won. And how—!

Bill's first victory came the following day, on 9 July 1940. He was in 'A' Flight, patrolling over the sea East of Dover. 30 minutes into the patrol a formation of nine Bf109s was spotted. According to Bill's combat report (AIR 50/33/55):

I was flying Red 2 of A flight and carrying out interception in company with fellow section at about 15,000' over mid-channel S.E. of Dover. Enemy aircraft was sighted some 7-8000' overhead heading for Dover, making full use of moderate cloud. We lost Yellow Section and Red 3 among cloud as we were climbing up to intercept E.A. Red 1 and I orbited maintaining height at approx 20,000'. A dog fight developed between Hurricanes and M.E. 109's and Red 1 and I joined in at full speed. After milling about for a short time, I climbed up behind two M.E.109's who ventured from the base of the cloud at about 19,000' in formation. I carried out an astern attack on the rear enemy aircraft, opening fire at 300 yards and holding the burst for about three seconds. Pieces flew from E.A. and my tracer converged at his cockpit. E.A. with thick black smoke pouring from it headed for the sea diving steeply and crashed a few miles from the French coast. In the meantime, the other E.A. had gone down in a diving turn and another Hurricane, which eventually proved to be Yellow 1, and myself, chased him towards the French coast. Yellow 1 was considerably closer and the M.E. 109 crossed the French coast with black smoke pouring from it and appeared to be losing height rapidly. As I was due to change over onto Reserve tank, I broke away some miles from the French coast and returned to base. Hurricane with Rotol airscrew and at full throttle with emergency boost control pulled, it appeared to be rapidly overtaking the M.E.109.'

Bill was modest about his first victory. In a letter to his parents, published in the Adelaide Advertiser on 18 October 1940, he was quoted as saying:

'I avenged the loss of one of my comrades.' Pilot-Officer Millington said 'On patrol over mid-Channel, four of us ran into a formation of 9 M.E. 109's We were soon milling around in a terrific dogfight. I was fortunate to get on the tail of a Hun and he was soon diving for the sea in flames. We chased another over the French coast but shot him before turning back. Our machines are vastly superior to those of the Luftwaffe and Jerry gets very shy when tackled, and usually breaks up and streaks for home

With only seven of their pre-war pilots left, exhausted and suffering too many losses in too few days, as the first phase of the Battle of Britain began on 10 July 1940, 79 Squadron was ordered North to RAF Acklington, Northumberland, to rebuild and get back to operational status under a new Leader. Squadron Leader John Heyworth constantly drilled his Squadron and they arrived at operational readiness on 31 July 1940, but things were quiet for the first two weeks of August, with only an occasional lone intruder to break the monotony.

Adlertag ('Eagle Day'), 13 August 1940, was the first day of *Unternehmen Adlerangriff* ('Operation Eagle Attack') the codename for a military operation by the Luftwaffe to destroy the RAF. The essential target was RAF Fighter command.

On 15 August 1940, the Luftwaffe launched a series of attacks designed to overwhelm RAF defences. In the south, forward airfields in Kent were targeted between 10:45 AM and 11:30 AM. Four squadrons were dispatched to deal with this threat. Dover, Hythe, Folkestone and Lympne were bombarded, with Lympne suffering the most damage, which resulted in it being unserviceable for two days.

At about 9:30 AM on 15 August, a large formation of German He115 float planes took off from Stavanger in Norway. Heading for Dundee in Scotland, they had been tasked to attract fighter squadrons based around Edinburgh. The He115s were followed about half an hour later by 72 He111s, each loaded with high explosive bombs, escorted by 21 Bf110s fitted with long-range belly tanks. The



All of Bill's victories were achieved while flying Hurricanes. In the hands of a skilled pilot, the Hurricane could achieve great success. In fact, during the Battle of Britain between July and October 1940, 1,720 of them took part and had the honour of claiming 80% of enemy aircraft shot down by Fighter Command. Image: Hurricane Mk I, W9232, Station Flight, Northolt, Middlesex – Imperial War Museum MH 3186.

floatplanes and the main force were supposed to follow separate tracks, but navigational errors resulted in them flying almost identical courses.

The He115s turned back about 40 miles before arriving at the Scottish coast. Fighter Command controllers originally thought there were only three aircraft on their way, but this was soon amended to it being over 30. Acklington squadrons were on readiness and the takeoff order was given at noon. 72 Squadron was in the air within 20 minutes, 79 Squadron followed at 12:42 PM, and three other squadrons were not far behind. 72 Squadron was ordered North to the Farne Islands off the Northumberland coast. Just before 12:45 PM, 72 Squadron encountered the enemy formation 30 miles east of the islands. After a furious battle lasting around 5 minutes, the enemy formation was split up, with part of it moving in a north-westerly direction and the other part in a south-westerly direction. Shortly afterwards, a large raid was reported approaching Acklington. Members of 79 Squadron, who were on their way to the Farne Islands changed course to intercept the 'large raid' but were clearly ill-prepared for the 60 to 80 bombers and their Bf110 escorts when they encountered them at 1 PM.

79 Squadron's Squadron Leader Heyworth, 'ploughed' his men into the bomber stream, breaking it up. Utter confusion followed, with every man for himself. 79 Squadron accounted for two Bf110s shot down and one probable. It was not long before they encountered a second seemingly overwhelming enemy formation but 79 Squadron attacked the mass of He111s regardless. Bill found himself alone with a Heinkel 111 in his sights and fired. After trailing black smoke, the Heinkel exploded into flames. Bill was already focused on another, fired again and the Squadron's third confirmed Heinkel was destroyed. The pilots of 79 Squadron returned to Acklington and all landed safely, with only one badly shot up Hurricane. Bill was credited with three Heinkel 111s destroyed that day.

The days at Acklington following 15 August 1940 offered little more than uneventful patrols for 79 Squadron pilots, with all of the action down south. 79 Squadron were then ordered back to Biggin Hill, to relieve 32 Squadron, arriving there on 27 August 1940. Pilots were given an official briefing on how to deal with the enemy and strict orders were given to break off any engagements at the Channel midpoint, due to higher RAF losses closer to the French coast. Bill saw action on 28 August and there was no operational flying for 79 Squadron on 29 August 1940.

Bill went on readiness on the morning of 30 August 1940 with one Bf109 and three He111s destroyed to his credit. When returning to Biggin Hill at about 12:15 PM, 'limping back home with his machine badly shot up' and with additional claims for one Heinkel destroyed and another probable, Bill was an ace. The remainder of 30 August 1940 saw Biggin Hill sustain severe damage from German bombers. When Bill and B flight landed from another sortie at 6:30 PM, the airfield was littered with bomb craters. While fewer than 20 bombs had been dropped, it was perhaps the Luftwaffe's most successful airfield raid so far, with workshops, cookhouses the Met office, stores and armoury all out of commission. The sergeants' mess, WAAF quarters and airmen's barracks were uninhabitable. Most of the station vehicles had been damaged and two aircraft on the ground were destroyed by fire. On top of the obviously visible damage, water, gas, and electricity had all been cut off and the ops room had lost contact with 11 Group headquarters. By the end of that long night, the bodies of 39 dead had been laid out and 26 injured personnel were treated for their injuries.

On 31 August 1940, the Germans launched a massive offensive lasting from 8 AM to 7 PM, with the south-east and eastern airfields the main targets. A raid was detected and 79 Squadron was ordered to protect the station. At 8:40 AM, Bill and the others ran to their Hurricanes, negotiating some remaining bomb craters that had not yet been filled. Before most could get to their aircraft, bombs were falling. By 12:30 PM, 79 Squadron was in the air again, directed to intercept a formation of about 40 JU88s and escorts that had crossed the coast near Folkestone and were heading for Croydon. The Squadron were surprised by about 20 Bf109s that had dived on them from out of the sun. A dogfight followed between Hurricanes and Bf109s, ranging from 15,000 feet down to 3000 feet. During this action, Bill managed to destroy one Bf109 but his hurricane sustained serious damage, including damage to the hydraulic system, necessitating a forced landing near Folkestone and his return to Croydon in a police car.

At 5:45 PM, as another enemy force approached Biggin Hill, Bill and 79 Squadron's B Flight were tasked with aerodrome guard duties. In the action that followed, Bill attacked a large formation of Dornier 215s which were protected by large numbers of enemy fighters. He set the port engine of a Dornier alight and followed the aircraft down as it was shedding bits and pieces over Biggin Hill aerodrome. While distracted, Bill was pounced on by three Bf109s but was able to shoot down or damage one of them and then shook off the other two. By now close to the coast, Bill pursued the bombers on their homeward track but was again set upon by more Bf109s. He dodged one and emptied the last of his ammunition into another. The latter Bf109 caught fire and crashed into a military firing range south of Lydd. Again, distracted while watching the pilot climb out of the crashed Bf109, Bill was attacked by yet another Bf109 over Romney Marsh. A cannon shell exploded on the left side of his cockpit and the engine and radiator were hit. Bill told his sister a few weeks later, 'I was shot up badly by cannon fire and wounded in the thigh.'

With the engine starting to burn and the cockpit filling with heavy black smoke, Bill struggled to open the hood. As the flames took hold, he prepared to bail out. He looked down and caught sight of the village of Tenterden, Kent, nestled on the edge of the Weald. Fearing his aircraft would crash into the village, Bill remained in the aircraft and attempted a landing, crash landing in flames at Conghurst Farm, Hawkhurst. Bill was dragged from his Hurricane and seconds later it exploded. Although 'covered in blood and grease' and wounded, with assistance he was able to walk towards a nearby farmhouse, to clean up and drink the inevitable cup of tea.

An article in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 9 September 1940, carried the headline 'SA PILOT'S ADVENTURES, Thrilling Duels with Raiders, WOUNDED IN DOG FIGHT.' Opening with: '*Pilot-Officer William Millington, 23, of South Australia, who received his R.A.F. wings only in April, is now convalescing from wounds received in the course of two days of violent fighting, in which his Hurricane was twice riddled with bullets and finally set on fire by a cannon shell from a Messerschmitt. Pilot Officer Millington, whose bag is now eight, including three bombers shot down on August 15 over a north-east town, hopes to rejoin his squadron soon*', the article went on to describe '*the most intense phase of his [Bill's] adventures*' beginning on 30 August 1940. According to the article, Bill was sent to hospital with 'slight shrapnel wounds in the thigh and many cuts and bruises.'

Bill's victories to this point amounted to six enemy aircraft destroyed, two probables and one damaged. He had taken part in nearly every patrol since joining 79 Squadron in June 1940 and he had gained a reputation for displaying great courage in attacking superior numbers of enemy aircraft. Recognising that bravery and Bill's choice to make a crash-landing rather than abandoning his aircraft and letting it fall in flames into a village, Squadron Leader Heyworth recommended Bill for a Distinguished Flying Cross. Attached to Squadron Leader Heyworth's recommendation were additional remarks from Air Vice Marshall Keith Park: '*I consider he is well worthy of reward and strongly recommend him for the Immediate Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross.*'

The citation for the DFC, published in the *London Gazette* of 1 October 1940, read:

In August 1940, this officer was flying as a member of a section engaged on aerodrome guard patrol. Fifteen Dorniers escorted by a large number of Messerschmitts were sighted and an attack was ordered. Pilot Officer Millington succeeded in damaging a Dornier but was in turn engaged by three Messerschmitts. He damaged one, shook off the other two and, single-handed, again engaged the bombers. During a further attack by two of the enemy fighters, he shot down one but a cannon shell burst in the engine of his aircraft causing it to burn. Pilot Officer Millington, although suffering from a wound, chose to make a crash landing rather than abandon his aircraft and so endanger a village in front of him. He succeeded in getting clear just before the petrol tanks exploded. A few days previously, he attacked a formation of about sixty Heinkels, two of which he destroyed.

After being wounded on 31 August 1940, Bill spent 10 days in Croydon Hospital. After leaving hospital, Bill rejoined 79 Squadron which was resting and rebuilding at RAF Pembrey, Wales. The Squadron carried out various patrols but saw no action during this period. On 19 September 1940, Bill was posted, as a 'replacement pilot' to 249 Squadron at North Weald. 249 Squadron had been in action almost every day since 1 September, experiencing hard fighting and engaging the enemy up to four times each day. Pilot Officer Thomas Francis Neil (known as both Tom and Ginger) recalled pilots arriving and leaving almost unnoticed. He said, 'if new boys were considered experienced, they were put on the state and required to muck in immediately without our paying very much attention to them.' Neil recalled Bill as 'a small, fair chap with a tiny moustache. An Australian apparently, though he did not look or sound like one.' (Born in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, and migrating as a child to South Australia, Bill had never lost his 'Geordie' accent).

Three days before Bill arrived, the Air Ministry had sent a signal congratulating 249 Squadron on its 'magnificent fighting' on 15 September. Bill, who had returned to 79 Squadron after leaving hospital, did not take part in the action on Sunday, 15 September 1940, which has since been celebrated as 'Battle of Britain Day'. On this day, the Luftwaffe launched a concentrated attack against London, hoping to destroy the RAF once and for all. Failure to break the RAF and gain air supremacy over the south of England resulted in Hitler postponing his invasion plans indefinitely.



Hurricanes of 249 Squadron scramble against an incoming raid during the Summer of 1940. Image: 249 (Gold Coast) Squadron Association.

At 249 Squadron, Bill was put into B Flight and flew a number of patrols during his first week. He encountered no enemy aircraft during this time. On 25 September 1940, there was major excitement surrounding the announcement of DFCs being awarded to Tom Neil and James Meaker. Although Bill's DFC was not gazetted until the 1st of October, his new friends at 249 Squadron would have been aware of it.



Bill was responsible for introducing 'a little black and white terrier of indeterminate ancestry,' named 'pipsqueak', to the squadron as a mascot. Pipsqueak was followed soon after by a white duck named 'Wilfred'. Both would accompany their masters to the local pub where Wilfred apparently had a taste for the best bitter.



Googling '249 Squadron' or 'William Millington DFC' images' turned up a lot of images of the pair with various squadron members.

Far left: Bill holding Wilfred the duck and Tom Neil holding Pipsqueak.

Left: Sgt GCC Palliser, F/O E Cassidy, P/O RENE Wynn, Adj EFML Fayolle, Sgt JP Mills and Sgt HJ Davidson with Wilfred and Pipsqueak.

27 September 1940 saw Bill's first victory at 249 Squadron. The following is taken from the HQ No.11 Group Intelligence Patrol Report for 249 Squadron for that date:

..... 11 Hurricanes of 249 Squadron left North Weald to patrol Hornchurch at 20,000 feet with 46 Squadron. 9 landed at North Weald by 16:00 hours. One force landed at West Malling.

10/12 Junkers 88, of which some may have been Dorniers, were seen flying very fast up the Thames Estuary towards London in vics of 3 line astern, with a large escort of ME.109's stepped up to 25,000 feet. No particular method of attack was adopted owing to the high speed, the ME.109's dived to attack and there was a general Melee. The enemy was engaged in a running fight out to sea. The pilots all confirm that not one of the enemy bombers reached the French coast, as a lot of other Hurricanes took part in the combat.

Notes & Tactics.

P/O Millington secured his first victim (JU.88) by climbing 1,000 feet above and making steep diving quarter attack on the rear enemy aircraft, followed by a further quarter attack. He also used a quarter attack against the second JU.88 which he shared with P/O Neil.

The JU.88 which Sgt. Mills destroyed very nearly escaped by diving to sea level. Two other Hurricanes made ineffective astern attacks but Sgt. Mills sent enemy aircraft into the sea with a quarter attack.

Sgt. Davidson used a beam and then an astern attack in destroying his JU.88.

P/O Barclay had to use boost cut out to catch up the JU.88 which he destroyed. He notices that enemy aircraft smoked from both engines as he fired, but twice the smoke stopped and enemy aircraft rejoined formation. This may have been a ruse.

Our success in this combat seems to be due to the fact that for once the enemy were engaged by equal or superior numbers of our fighters. There were enough friendly fighters about both to keep the enemy fighters busy and to see that not one bomber escaped, as will be seen, most of our fighters were not molested in their attacks on the bombers.

<u>Enemy casualties:</u>	<u>Destroyed.</u>
1 JU.88	P/O Millington. (on land)
1 JU.88	P/O Neil (in sea)
1 JU.88	P/O Neil & Millington. (in sea)
1 JU.88	P/O Barclay. (on land)
1 JU.88	Sgt. Davidson (on land)
1 JU.88	Sgt. Mills. (shared with another Hurricane)
1 JU.88	P/O Lewis. (in sea)
2 ME.109's	P/O Lewis (on land)
2 ME.109's	Sgt. Beard. (in sea)
	<u>Damaged.</u>
1 DO.215 ?	Sgt. Beard. (on land)
<u>Our casualties:</u>	(a) Aircraft - 1 out. 3.
	1 out. 2.

The Intelligence Report (shown left) included a list of enemy casualties: seven bombers and four fighters destroyed and one bomber damaged.

There was one personnel casualty, with P/O Meaker killed.

According to Bill's combat report:

The Squadron attacked formation of 10+ Ju88s. I climbed 1000 feet above enemy bombers and made a steep dive quarter attack on the rear E/A. At this time there were only seven or eight bombers left as they were being continuously attacked by Hurricanes. Rear E/A left formation smoking and I delivered quarter attack opening fire at 100 yards closing. Port engine of enemy aircraft exploded and E/A dived down steeply to ground in flames. Three fighters some thousands of feet below seemed to be following E.A. down. E.A. crashed approximately south east of Petworth. Bomber formation split up and not one reached the French coast. P/O Neil and I attacked the remaining Ju88 at about 4,000' which had been attacked by a number of our fighters, but was still maintaining height and flying steadily over the coast. I delivered a quarter attack opening fire from 100 yards closing and the Starboard motor of EA burst into flames. E.A. dived steeply over the coast losing height rapidly and P/O Neil finished it off with a burst from close range. EA crashed into sea of Shoreham. Rounds fired 2240. One gun failed to fire owing to ammunition misfiring.

The 249 Squadron Operations Record Book reported very bad weather in early October and heavy cloud. Bill flew six patrols on the first two days of October 1940, each in excess of one hour duration and less than an hour on the ground between patrols. Bad weather continued until the clouds disappeared on 7 October.

Bill carried out four patrols on 7 October. The first three were uneventful. Following the third patrol, 249 Squadron were tasked to Maidstone. 46 Squadron led the wing and 249 Squadron flew above, as weaving escorts. North of Ashford, 20 to 30 Bf109s were sighted flying in loose formation between 20,000 and 30,000 feet. A squadron of Spitfires had already engaged the enemy fighters. At about 4:15 PM, the wing joined the dogfight at 21,000 feet. Bill chased a Bf109 which dived down steeply. Rather than continue the pursuit, Bill left the enemy aircraft to others and climbed back up to about 22,000 feet and into the sun. He then selected another Bf109 that was harassing another fighter and dived down. In Bill's words, 'It broke off his attack and turned steeply in front of me, offering a plain view of his underside at point blank range. I gave him a short burst. The Messerschmitt turned on his back dived steeply down emitting black smoke.' Bill did not see the enemy aircraft crash, but the black smoke was a clear sign it was out of the battle. He was credited with a 'probably destroyed.'

It was noted in the combat report submitted by Bill for this action that after the Me.109 had 'dived steeply down, emitting black smoke', Bill was then 'tackled by two Spitfires so broke off engagement.' In the last paragraph of his report he wrote, 'The battle in my opinion broke up due to the Spitfires mistaking Hurricanes for ME 109's and attacking them.'

Following Bill's success on 7 October, the Operations Record Book shows bad weather continued on and off throughout October. 249 Squadron continued to fly whenever the weather permitted but there were few sightings of the enemy.

The following is taken from a Fighter Command Combat Report for 25 October 1940, from HQ No. 11 Group to HQ Fighter Command, where Bill was credited for another 'probably destroyed' on a Bf109:

Twelve Hurricanes of 249 Squadron left North Weald at 11:24 hours, to join up with 46 Squadron over base and carry out a patrol.

249 Squadron, led by F Lt. Barton, climbed up to 25,000 feet, escorting 46 Squadron's leader. As they approached the ME.109's turned round and dived, aiming for the coast.

At the same time three of four rearguard of 249 and 46 Squadron were attacked individually by some ME. 109's which were above them.

Three Hurricanes were chased by 109's and two Hurricanes went into flames. Sgt. Beard was probably a pilot of one of these Hurricanes. Nothing has been heard of Sgt. Beard since the encounter.

The Me. 109's below, split into two groups, most of them flying towards France, followed by one main body of 249 & 46 Squadrons.

Blue 2. (P/O Worrall) and about four other Hurricanes went North West after the other group of ME.109's which were probably bombers. Blue 2. made an astern attack on one of these aircraft seeing it fall to pieces with its petrol tank alight. During Blue 2's attack a second ME. 109 nearby did not attempt to counter-attack him. Subsequently Blue 2. chased this aircraft all over the sky towards the South.

(On the way down, he noticed a group of about 30 ME.109's above clouds which seemed to be forming up, perhaps in preparation to bomb.)

The ME.109 succeeded in disappearing into cloud just North of Dover. Blue 2. then patrolled Dover and saw six ME. 109's above the cloud, circling around. These may have been waiting to escort the bombers returning from the London area at 6,000 feet. Blue 2. attacked one of the ME. 109's which immediately dived to avoid

him. It was noticeable that none of this cluster of ME. 109's attempted to fight him or even to attack a Lysander which flew below them.

During the attack on the rear of 249 Squadron, Yellow 1 (P/O Neil D.F.C.) saw the enemy leader overshoot after firing. Yellow 1. attacked him 'from 50 yards range' he states in his combat report, 'I was able to deliver a 2-second burst. A large piece broke from the E/A and it jerked very noticeably, finally turning on its back and going down vertically (1. ME. 109 Probably Destroyed)...

Blue leader, P/O Millington, D.F.C., who was one of the rearguards, became separated from his Squadron and involved in another dog-fight behind them on the right. He carried out an astern attack on a ME. 109, firing from about 50 yards. The E/A was unaware of his presence. 'Large pieces flew off he states' and E/A dived steeply through clouds, large quantities of black smoke pouring from it. Presumably it crashed in the vicinity of Hastings or in the sea.

A few minutes after the first encounter the main body of the Squadron saw 12 ME. 109's about 5,000 feet above trying to position themselves for an attack on them. Both squadrons manoeuvred for some time until the ME.109's made isolated attacks of the rearguard.

Many groups of 2 or 3 ME. 109's was seen at 12,000 feet making for Home. 10 Hurricanes landed at North Weald by 12.50 hours.

Bill carried out seven patrols on 26 and 27 October, lasting between 55 minutes and one hour 45 minutes. Longer patrols had now become the norm, with the majority, like these, having little or nothing to report.

Mid-morning on 28 October, 249 Squadron was detailed to a standing patrol over North Weald. Bill was again Blue One and weaving above the main Squadron formation. They were patrolling above the clouds near Hawkinge. At about 10:10 AM, control reported a bandit coming south-west about 10 miles north-east of 249 Squadron's position. They were north of Hastings when Bill sighted the Dornier breaking through the clouds about 3 miles to their north-east. According to Bill's combat report:

I was patrolling above cloud with 249 Squadron near Hawkinge. Control reported bandit coming S.W. about 10 miles N.E. of us. I sighted the Do17 as it broke cloud about 3 miles to the North-East, started to dive towards it and reported position to leader Red 1. Burst of A.A. fire close to E.A. drew attention of Red 1 to E.A. And three more A/C were dispatched. I dived on E.A. from above and behind, opening fire at about 200 yards. Bullets could be seen penetrating rear turret and I closed to about 50 yards before breaking away. Lack of fire from rear turret leads me to believe that rear gunner was killed. E.A. streamed white smoke and vanished into clouds, but smoke had vanished when it again appeared. E.A. escaped in clouds. Yellow 1 [Tom Neil] then joined me and on instructions from controller we orbited at 12,000 feet. Positioned near Dungeness. We sighted a Ju88 occasionally breaking cloud coming from the North, waited for it to come into the clear and attacked from above. Yellow 1 came in behind E.A. and I carried out a quarter attack from above it having full deflection and with a long burst fired his starboard engine. As I was out of ammunition I made a few dummy attacks from above to keep gunner engaged while Yellow 1 continued. Yellow 1 killed rear gunner and there appeared to be a small explosion in the rear of the fuselage. E.A. was heading S.E. streaming white smoke. Out of ammunition we broke off. E.A. was sighted again by Yellow 3 who finished it off. E.A. crashing in sea 10-15 miles S.E. of Dungeness.

Bill flew three times on 29 October. Shortly before 5 PM the Squadron was ordered to scramble when bombs started to fall on North Weald. According to Bill's combat report:

Just after Squadron was ordered to scramble bombs started to fall on aerodrome so I took off as quickly as possible behind Red section. ME 109's dropped on aerodrome and made off due west diving down to about 500 feet. Red section chased EA at that height. Being a little behind I opened up to maximum speed and gradually overhauled EA which had climbed to about 3,000 feet. Over the coast west of Southminster there were four ME 109s in front with two He113s weaving slightly behind. One ME 109 was lagging behind on the right and I formatted on him line astern and opened fire at about 100 yards. EA immediately dived for the haze over the sea and I followed close behind firing continuous burst. Large pieces flew off E.A. and it disappeared going vertically down into the haze at about 500 feet emitting large quantities of black smoke. Estimated that EA crashed into sea in vicinity of sands. Rounds fired 2320 in continuous burst. Weather thick haze from 0 – 1,000 feet.

30 October 1940 was 'a miserable, bitty and perfectly bloody day' according to Tom Neil, and the cloudy and drizzly weather did not improve. At midday, 249 Squadron were ordered to patrol over the base. The windscreen in Tom Neil's Hurricane was leaking and he was forced to retire to the base. Bill and the rest of the Squadron moved south. Over the coast, 8-12 Bf109s were sighted at 28,000 feet. The enemy aircraft scattered, and individual chases took place. It is reported in the 249 Squadron Operations

Record Book that 'pilots noticed that groups of 109s repeatedly flew out to see and then turned back again as if to entice others out to sea'. Bill was last seen chasing an enemy aircraft out over the Channel. Later analysis of Luftwaffe claims indicated Bill may have fallen victim to Feldwebel Bielefeldt, a Bf109 pilot with 3 Staffel [I/JG51], who claimed shooting down a Hurricane about the time Bill disappeared.

In her book, *Australia's Few and the Battle of Britain*, Dr Kristen Alexander provided some discussion about what may have happened to Bill Millington:

As he had averred in his 8 July 1940 letter that was published in the Advertiser, Bill had gone down fighting. But his actions had been contrary to directions. Just before he bowed out of 79 Squadron operations, Bill and his confreres had been ordered to break off Channel engagements before reaching mid-point. He would have been aware of Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park's instructions to controllers to avoid engagements with small formations over the sea. Indeed, Tom Neil was surprised the Australian had chased the Me109s. He did not recall Bill ever forsaking normal fighter practice, 'being particularly individualistic' or going off 'on special lone forays.' Yet the next-of-kin letter sent to the Millingtons stated that 'when things were quiet with the squadron he would sneak off in a Hurricane and prowling around hunting Jerries.' Not only that, but 'he would always be the last to return to the base after a battle because, if petrol and ammunition remained, he would go alone hunting trouble. His favourite area was the French coast.' The squadron's operations record book does not support this assertion, but perhaps it is true, as, in the majority of cases, pilots were neatly and coincidentally noted as landing at the same time or within five minutes of each other. True or not, it would have been a comforting thought to a family whose kith and kin were in the Luftwaffe's bomb sights to know that their son had been actively trying to protect them.

And if Bill wasn't 'hunting for trouble,' why did he disregard orders? Why did he fall to the lure of the enemy fighters when he did not have the advantage of height and surprise? Did his determination to fight at all costs overtake common sense and experience? Or did he suffer hypoxia-induced euphoria and increasing confusion as his oxygen ran out at an altitude of over 20,000 feet? This was a possibility for a squadron coping with under par Hurricanes, and indeed, Sergeant Edward Bayley had vanished during a patrol of Rochford on 10 October after flying at 24,000 feet; it was believed at the time that he had lost consciousness because either he ran out of oxygen or the supply failed.

EPILOGUE:

It was reported in the Advertiser, 4 November 1940 that Bill's father had been advised by the Air Board, Melbourne that Bill had been 'reported missing as a result of air operations on October 30.' After some months of silence, Mr. Millington received advice 'with deep regret All efforts to trace your son Have proved unavailing, and it is feared that all hope of finding him alive must be abandoned.' And action would now be taken to presume his death for official purposes. In May 1941 and again on 11 September 1941, Mr. Millington was again contacted and asked if he had received any further evidence of news regarding his son. Within weeks of responding, Mr. & Mrs. Millington were advised that 'in view of the lapse of time in the absence of any further news regarding your son ... must regretfully conclude that he has lost his life.' Death was presumed to have occurred on the day Bill Millington had gone missing, i.e., 30 October 1940, the second to last day of the Battle of Britain.

When writing her book *Australia's Few and the Battle of Britain*, Dr Kirsten Alexander, wanting to write an intimate account of the pilots who were the subject of her book, scoured public records and attempted to track down family members of the eight pilots she was writing about. Bill Millington was a childless only son, his sisters had all married, changed their names, scattered, and had died by the time Kirsten started her search. Some of the sisters had no children and others could not be traced.

On 5 April 2009, Kirsten was contacted by Bill Millington's great nephew, Simon Robinson, advising her he had a significant collection of letters and memorabilia he was happy to share with Kirsten. Amongst the personal letters was a letter written by Bill to his parents in June 1940. It was clearly expected to be the last communication with his mother and father. After signing it 'Farewell, your loving son, Bill,' he folded the page, slipped it into an envelope and wrote firmly on the top left-hand corner, 'To be forwarded in the event of fatal accident.' Bill gave the letter for safe keeping to Miss Celia Macdonald who he described as 'a particularly good friend to me.'

Because of her special relationship with the RAF, Miss Celia Macdonald had been advised Bill had been presumed dead but had not forwarded Bill's letter immediately to his parents, and in the meantime, having been entrusted with his 'last letter' and with gathering up any of Bill's personal effects in the event of some untoward incident, she had unpacked Christmas parcels that had come from Australia and sent them off again to be divided among his friends.

Miss Macdonald forwarded Bill's letter to his parents late in 1941. The *Advertiser*, 13 December 1941, printed extracts from Miss Macdonald's letter:

Bill entrusted this letter (to his parents) to me a long time ago and I have not sent it to you sooner because I knew you had such a strong feeling that he would still turn up, and, like you, I hoped and hoped. But now they tell me from the Air Ministry that since so many months have passed without news of him, we must presume that he was killed. You, his mother can indeed be proud of him and I, one of his many friends, can be grateful for his trust and affection and for the inspiration and help I gained from his great unselfish spirit.'

The *Advertiser* printed in full the last letter home from, Pilot-Officer William (Bill) Millington, also known as 'Terrier':

My Dear Parents—

I have asked Miss McDonald of the Isles, who has been a particularly good friend to me, to forward this short note, together with any of my personal effects you may desire in the event of some untoward incident. The possibility of a hasty departure from this life is ever present. I have endeavoured to adjust my personal affairs as well as possible under the circumstances. I go forth to battle, light of heart, and determined to do my bit for the noble cause for which my country is fighting. Having studied the subject from all angles, I am certain that freedom, liberty and democracy will eventually prove victorious whatever the cost.

Being British I am proud of my country-and its people, proud to serve under the Union Jack, and regard it as an Englishman's privilege to fight for all those things that make life worth living, freedom, honour and fair play—the things which have made our Empire what it is today.

Since leaving home, I have endeavoured to live up to those standards dictated by honour and chivalry, and am sure that I have not failed you.

For any sorrow or suffering I may have caused, I sincerely apologise, but please do not grieve over my passing. I would not have otherwise.

Flying has meant more to me than just a career or means of livelihood. The companionship of men and boys with similar interests, the intoxication of speed, the rush of air and the pulsating beat of the motor, awakes some answering chord deep down which is indescribable.

Farewell,

Your loving son,

BILL.

The next day, 14 December 1941, Rev John H. Crossley of Adelaide's Pirie Street Methodist Church made reference to Bill Millington's last letter home in his sermon, which spoke of men who endured adversity yet held onto their faith. He said, '*Of them the world was not worthy - they were indeed truly great ones.*' He had the following to say about Bill Millington:

One of the finest young men of this city. Quiet, home loving, distinguishing himself time and again over the English Channel in his Spitfire, no odds were too great for him. no risks too many. No reckless, daredevil, unreflective youth, love for his home, people, and country, was the inspiration of his breath-taking power-dives and blazing guns.

In his parting message, he being dead yet speaketh, he failed at last to return, but that was the only failure. He did not fail his ideal and his honour.

From his first victory, on 9 July 1940, 23-year-old Pilot Officer William Henry 'Terrier' Millington DFC had accumulated a total of nine and two shared destroyed, four probables and three damaged enemy aircraft. He was a double ace and the fourth highest scoring of those Australians acknowledged by the Battle of Britain Monument and the Battle of Britain Historical Society.

He was the 13th and last Australian pilot to lose his life during the Battle of Britain. He is remembered on the Christopher Foxley-Norris Memorial Wall at the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-le-Ferne, on which the names are recorded of all those aircrew known to have flown at least one sortie with an accredited squadron or unit of the RAF during the Battle of Britain, including those who survived the war. He is remembered on Panel 9 on the Runnymede Memorial, an Air Forces Memorial dedicated to some 20,456 men and women from air forces of the British Empire who were lost in air and other operations during WW II. Those recorded have no known grave anywhere in the world, and many were lost without trace. He is remembered on the Battle of Britain London Monument, Victoria Embankment. London, which lists 2,937 British and Allied Airmen who were awarded the Battle of Britain clasp for having flown at least one authorized sortie with an accredited unit or RAF Fighter Command during the Battle. He, along with 103 others, is remembered on a Adelaide Technical High School Honour Board recording old scholars who had died on active service.



*Statue at Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-Le-Ferne.
Image: Battle of Britain Memorial Trust website.*



*The Christopher Foxley-Norris Memorial Wall at the
Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-Le-Ferne.
Image: Battle of Britain Memorial Trust website.*



*Battle of Britain London Monument, Victoria Embankment,
showing lists of names. Image: Wikimedia Commons.*



*Part of the elaborate sculptures on the monument.
This part depicting aircrew scrambling. Image:
Battle of Britain London Monument website.*



Runnymede Memorial. Image: RAF St Clement Danes Church website.



*Part of the panel
inside the
Runnymede
Memorial
showing
Bill Millington's
name.*

SPECIAL THANKS:

Special thanks to Dr Kristen Alexander, author of *Australia's Few and the Battle of Britain*, the story of eight Australian fighter pilots engaged in the Battle of Britain, for providing her detailed notes and images from a talk she gave on Bill Millington at the Naval, Military and Air Force Club in Adelaide on 5 November 2015, together with her permission to use details and images from her talk notes and her book.

REFERENCES:

Australia's Few and the Battle of Britain by Dr Kristen Alexander.

Notes and images from Dr Kristen Alexander's talk about Bill Millington given at the Naval Military and Air Force Club South Australia on 5 November 2015.

Men of the Battle of Britain by Kenneth G. Wynn.

The Fallen Few of the Battle of Britain by Norman Franks, Nigel McCrery & Edward McManus

Adelaide Advertiser: 18 October 1940, 4 November 1940, 13 & 15 December 1941

Adelaide News, 9 September 1940,

National Archives UK: AIR 50/33/35, AIR 50/96/10, AIR 56/90/50

London Gazette, 1 October 1940

Blue and Gold Alumni Association Inc. Newsletter April 2021 – Memorial Album WW2 Edition.

Websites:

Battle of Britain Historical Society: <https://www.battleofbritain1940.net>

The Battle of Britain Memorial Trust <https://www.battleofbritainmemorial.org/>

The Battle of Britain London Monument <http://www.bbm.org.uk/airmen/Millington.htm>

249 (Gold Coast) Squadron Association <https://249squadron.wordpress.com/>

Gary Petts

SAAM History Group

October 2022