

= Paterson Clarence Hughes =

Paterson Clarence " Pat " Hughes , DFC ( 19 September 1917 ? 7 September 1940 ) was an Australian fighter ace of World War II . Serving with the Royal Air Force ( RAF ) , he was credited with as many as seventeen aerial victories during the Battle of Britain , before being killed in action on 7 September 1940 . His tally made him the highest @-@ scoring Australian of the battle , and among the three highest @-@ scoring Australians of the war .

Born in Cooma , New South Wales , Hughes joined the Royal Australian Air Force as a cadet in 1936 . After graduating as a pilot , he chose to take a commission with the RAF . In July 1937 , he was assigned to No. 64 Squadron , which operated Hawker Demon and , later , Bristol Blenheim fighters . Posted to No. 234 Squadron following the outbreak of World War II , Hughes began flying Supermarine Spitfires as a flight commander . He shared in his unit 's first aerial victory on 8 July 1940 , and began scoring heavily against the Luftwaffe the following month . Known for his practice of attacking his targets at extremely close range , Hughes is generally thought to have died after his Spitfire was struck by flying debris from a German bomber that he had just shot down . He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross , and was buried in England .

= = Early life = =

Paterson Clarence Hughes was born in Numeralla , near Cooma , New South Wales , on 19 September 1917 . He was the second @-@ youngest of twelve children , the last of four boys in his family . Hughes ' father was a teacher by profession but at the time of Pat 's birth was running the community post office ; christened Percival Clarence Hughes , and known as Percy , he had apparently adopted the name Paterson by the time of his marriage to Catherine Vennell in 1895 . Percy was also a writer , contributing to newspapers and magazines such as The Bulletin , and " Paterson " may have been homage to the poet Banjo Paterson . In any case , Pat shared his father 's interest in literature . He also grew to love the landscape of the local Monaro district in the shadow of the Snowy Mountains , which he described as " unrivalled in the magnificence and grandeur of its beauty " .

Hughes was educated at Cooma Public School until the age of twelve , when the family moved to Haberfield in Sydney ; his father was by then working as a labourer . He attended Petersham Boys ' School , becoming a prefect in 1932 and vice captain the following year . As well as playing sport , he was a keen aircraft modeller and built crystal radio sets . Having attained his intermediate certificate , Hughes entered Fort Street High School in February 1934 . He left after eight months to take up employment at Saunders ' Jewellers in George Street , Sydney , and enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) on 20 January 1936 . Hughes had also applied to , and been accepted by , the Royal Australian Navy , but chose the RAAF .

Training as an air cadet at RAAF Point Cook near Melbourne , Hughes learnt to fly in de Havilland Moths before progressing to Westland Wapitis in the middle of the year . A practical joker who bridled under RAAF discipline , his euphoria during his first solo on 11 March 1936 was such that he " went mad , whistled , sang and almost jumped for joy " . A fellow cadet recalled that Hughes " loved life and lived it at high pressure " . Upon graduation in December 1936 , Hughes was assessed as having " no outstanding qualities " despite being " energetic and keen " . Under a pre @-@ war arrangement between the British and Australian governments , he volunteered for transfer to the Royal Air Force ( RAF ) , and sailed for the United Kingdom in January 1937 . His decision to transfer had not been quick or easy ; though keen to " try and do something special " in England , and intrigued by " a fascinating picture of easy life , beer and women " that had been presented to him , in the end he felt that it was simply " willed " that he should go .

= = Early RAF service = =

On 20 March 1937 , Hughes was granted a five @-@ year short @-@ service commission as a pilot officer in the RAF . Like some of his compatriots , he refused to exchange his dark @-@ blue

RAAF uniform for the lighter @-@ coloured RAF one . He undertook advanced flying instruction at No. 2 Flying Training School in Digby , Lincolnshire . Slated to fly bombers , he appealed and in July was posted as a fighter pilot to No. 64 Squadron , which operated Hawker Demons out of RAF Martlesham Heath , Suffolk . The squadron was transferred to RAF Church Fenton , Yorkshire , in May 1938 . Hughes was promoted to flying officer on 19 November . No. 64 Squadron subsequently received Bristol Blenheim 1F twin @-@ engined fighters , and completed its conversion to the type in January 1939 .

Hughes was promoted to acting flight lieutenant in November 1939 and became a flight commander in the newly formed No. 234 Squadron , which , like No. 64 Squadron , came under the control of No. 13 Group in the north of England . On establishment the previous month at RAF Leconfield , East Yorkshire , No. 234 Squadron was equipped with Blenheims , Fairey Battles and Gloster Gauntlets ; it began re @-@ arming with Supermarine Spitfires in March 1940 and was operational two months later . The commanding officer , Squadron Leader Richard Barnett , rarely flew , and Hughes assumed responsibility for overseeing conversion to the Spitfire . " More experienced and more mature " than his fellow pilots , according to historian Stephen Bungay , the Australian " effectively led " No. 234 Squadron . By this time , Hughes had acquired a young Airedale Terrier known as Flying Officer Butch , who sometimes flew with him ? against regulations . He had also met and begun dating Kathleen ( " Kay " ) Brodrick of Hull . On 19 June , Hughes and his squadron transferred to RAF St Eval , Cornwall , under the jurisdiction of the newly formed No. 10 Group in south @-@ west England .

= = Battle of Britain = =

As the Battle of Britain got under way in July 1940 , Hughes shared in No. 234 Squadron 's first confirmed aerial victories . He and his section of two other Spitfires shot down a German Junkers Ju 88 attacking convoys near Lands End on 8 July , and another south @-@ east of Plymouth during a dawn patrol on 28 July . A shared claim for a Ju 88 on 27 July could not be confirmed as destroyed ; after a chase over the water at heights as low as 50 feet ( 15 m ) , the German escaped , despite being struck in the engines and cockpit , and was credited to the section as " damaged " . German records , made available post @-@ war , confirm that a Junkers 88A piloted by Leutnant Ruckdeschel , was lost on this day . On 1 August , Hughes was seconded from No. 234 Squadron to help set up the only Gloster Gladiator @-@ equipped unit to operate during the Battle of Britain , No. 247 ( China British ) Squadron in Plymouth . The same day , he married Kay Brodrick , who likened him to Errol Flynn , in the register office at Bodmin , Cornwall . Apart from Flying Officer Butch , the witnesses were strangers ; Kay arrived alone , and no @-@ one from No. 234 Squadron could attend . Barnett was transferred out of No. 234 Squadron on 13 August , and Hughes took temporary command until the arrival of Squadron Leader Joe " Spike " O 'Brien four days later . By now the fighting was intensifying over southern England , and the squadron relocated from St Eval to RAF Middle Wallop , Hampshire , on 14 August . Almost immediately after Hughes landed the Luftwaffe bombed the airfield ; several ground staff and civilian workers were killed , but No. 234 Squadron 's Spitfires escaped damage .

It was following No. 234 Squadron 's move to Middle Wallop that Hughes began to score heavily against German fighters . On 15 August , in one of the costliest engagements of the Battle of Britain , known thereafter to the Luftwaffe as " Black Thursday " , Hughes claimed victories ( one of them shared ) over two Messerschmitt Me 110s . He again achieved dual success on 16 , 18 and 26 August , all six victims being Messerschmitt Bf 109s brought down in the vicinity of the Isle of Wight . Whereas in July he had fired at his targets from a range of 150 to 50 yards ( 137 to 46 m ) , it was now his habit to close to 30 yards ( 27 m ) , approximately three Spitfire lengths , before delivering his final burst ; he also made head @-@ on attacks against enemy aircraft . He had a narrow escape on the 16th after his second victory of the day , when he chased a quartet of Junkers Ju 87s and had his tailplane shot up from behind by another Bf 109 ; he dived and forced the German to overshoot , then broke off having exhausted his ammunition firing at his former attacker . In the pub with Kay and his squadron mates that evening , Hughes jokingly told his wife , " In case of accidents

make sure you marry again " .

On 3 September , Hughes ' promotion to substantive flight lieutenant was promulgated in The London Gazette . He claimed three Me 110s in the space of fifteen minutes south of Haslemere on 4 September , two Bf 109s while patrolling Kenley the following day , and a Bf 109 destroyed plus one probable near Dover on 6 September ; he had to break off combat with the last @-@ mentioned when its tanks ruptured , covering Hughes ' canopy in oil . One of his victims on 5 September may have been Oberleutnant Franz von Werra , who was captured and subsequently became famous as " the one that got away " . Hughes and his protégé , Bob Doe , claimed half of No. 234 Squadron 's victories between mid @-@ August and early September .

Hughes was killed in action on the evening of 7 September 1940 , after he intercepted a Dornier Do 17 bomber taking part in a large @-@ scale attack on London . His Spitfire crashed in a field between Sundridge and Bessels Green in Kent . He apparently bailed out , but his parachute failed to open ; his body was found in a garden on Main Road , Sundridge , not far from the wreck of his Spitfire . The Dornier came down in the River Darent . No. 234 Squadron lost its commanding officer , O 'Brien , in the same action . Mystery surrounds exactly how Hughes came to grief , though his close @-@ in tactics are believed to have played a major part in it . The strain of regular combat without respite , manifesting itself in fatigue and spots before the eyes , may also have contributed . He is generally thought to have collided with flying wreckage from the crippled German bomber , rendering his Spitfire uncontrollable . It is also possible that Hughes accidentally rammed his target . Further speculation suggested that he was the victim of friendly fire from another British fighter attacking the same Dornier , or was struck by German bullets from a Bf 109 . Some observers on the ground , including collier Charles Hall , maintained that Hughes rammed the Dornier on purpose . Four days after his death , No. 234 Squadron was moved back to the relative quiet of Cornwall .

= = Legacy = =

The top @-@ scoring Australian flying ace of the Battle of Britain and one of fourteen Australian fighter pilots killed during the battle , Hughes has been described as " the inspiration and driving force behind No. 234 Squadron RAF " . He is generally credited with seventeen confirmed victories ? fourteen solo and three shared . This tally puts him among the top ten Allied Battle of Britain aces . It also ranks him among the three highest @-@ scoring Australians of World War II , after Clive Caldwell with thirty victories ( twenty @-@ seven solo and three shared ) and Adrian Goldsmith with seventeen ( sixteen solo and one shared ) .

A war widow after barely five weeks of marriage , Kay Hughes was inconsolable in her loss : " I wept until I could cry no more " . Flying Officer Butch ran out of the mess on the day of his master 's death , and was never seen again . Following a service at St James ' , Sutton @-@ on @-@ Hull , on 13 September 1940 , Hughes was buried in the churchyard at Row G , Grave 4 . A week later , Kay discovered she was pregnant , but eventually miscarried . She subsequently drove ambulances for the British war effort . News of his son 's marriage came as " a complete surprise " to Percy Hughes , who only learned of his daughter @-@ in @-@ law 's existence from the Australian Air Board 's casualty letter . Having married three more times after Hughes ' death , Kay died on 28 June 1983 and , in accordance with her wishes , her ashes were buried with her first husband , whose headstone was amended to read " In loving memory of his wife Kathleen " .

Hughes was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross ( DFC ) on 22 October 1940 for his " skill and determination " as a flight commander and " gallantry in his attacks on the enemy " ; Squadron Leader O 'Brien had recommended the decoration a week before their deaths . Kay was presented with the medal at Buckingham Palace on 23 June 1942 . In Australia , Hughes is commemorated at Christ 's Church , Kiama , with a memorial tablet placed by his sister Muriel . A special memorial is dedicated to him at Monaghan Hayes Place , Cooma . His name appears on the Battle of Britain Roll of Honour in Westminster Abbey , and on supplementary panel 12 in the Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial ( AWM ) , Canberra . The AWM also holds his DFC and service medals in its collection . Kay had given the medals to her sisters @-@ in @-@ law to pass on to Percy in the 1950s and , after being lost during an Anzac Day parade in the 1960s ,

they went through several family members ' hands before turning up in the safe of the Kiama Country Women 's Association ; they were donated to the AWM in 1990 . On 7 September 2005 , Charles Hall 's sons dedicated a plaque in Hughes ' honour at the house where he fell in Main Road , Sundridge ; Bob Doe attended , expressing his thanks for " an Australian who came to help us when we needed him " . Shoreham Aircraft Museum in Kent unveiled a memorial stone to Hughes at Sundridge on 23 August 2008 . On 15 September 2014 , the AWM 's daily Last Post Ceremony was dedicated to Hughes ' memory .

= = Combat record = =