

*Commemoration Service and Memorial
Unveiling for*

*Pilot Officer Hugh William Reilley
66 Squadron, Royal Air Force*



18 October 2025

Front Page. Original artwork by Geoff Nutkins 2025
Back Page. Still image of Hugh Reilley taken from surviving film of
66 Squadron on duty at Gravesend airfield in September 1940.

17th October 1940

Broken cloud with occasional showers across much of southern England enabled the Luftwaffe to continue fighter-bomber operations over London and the Home Counties. Although no major bombing raids were launched during the day, four sizeable sweeps involving more than 300 German aircraft crossed into southeastern England, including Bf 109s equipped with light bomb loads. While RAF Fighter Command responded with considerable force—scrambling nearly two dozen squadrons across the day—the results were mixed. Interceptions were often hampered by poor visibility and broken cloud, and several German formations reached central London.

Just before 15:10 hours, radar plotted four distinct formations approaching southeastern England. In total, around eighty aircraft advanced toward East London, Biggin Hill, and Kenley. This was the largest coordinated raid of the day, and fourteen RAF squadrons were scrambled in response. Hurricanes from Nos. 46, 229, 242, 249, 253, 302 (Polish), 303 (Polish), 501, and 605 Squadrons joined Spitfires from Nos. 41, 66, 72, 92, 222, and 603 Squadrons in a high-altitude running battle over Kent and the London outskirts. British pilots inflicted steady attrition on the attackers, with four Bf 109s confirmed destroyed, four more listed as probable and three damaged. RAF combat losses this day included four aircraft and four pilots.

**Remember them, for they gave their tomorrows for your
today.**

**P/O N N Campbell, 242 SQN P/O H W Reilley, 66 SQN
F/O A L Ricalton, 74 SQN P/O R Atkinson, 213 SQN**



At Squerryes Court:

Welcome

At the memorial site:

*Formal act of remembrance and dedication led by
Revd (Maj) Andrew White CF Officiating Chaplain London District*

Opening Prayer

Reading of High Flight - Leo Black

Prayer for Commendation and Peace

The Exhortation

Last Post - Brian Rance

(1 minutes silence)

Reveille - Brian Rance

Unveiling and Dedication of the Stone

Canadian National Anthem - Brian Rance

British National Anthem - Brian Rance

Closing Prayers

High Flight

By John Gillespie Magee Jr.

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
of sun-split clouds,—and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air*

*Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.*

Pilot Officer Hugh William Reilley

A brief History

Hugh Reilley was born on 28th. May 1918 in the Victoria Hospital, London Ontario, Canada. His father was Hugh William Reilly (note the missing "e" before the "y") from Smith Virginia, USA, and his mother was Annie Miller, from Aim Pier, Fraserburgh, Scotland. They had been married at Hamilton Ontario, Canada on 25th. October 1916.

They lived in Detroit until 1928/29 when the family moved back to London, Ontario. His parents separated soon afterwards and his father moved back to Detroit. Hugh's mother died in May 1930 and he was then brought up by his uncle and aunt, John and Rosina Miller, in London, Ontario, until 1939 when he left for England to join the Royal Air Force.

He was educated at The Tecumseh Public school and then the London South Collegiate 1933-8. A keen sportsman, he enjoyed most sports, particularly Rugby (American football) and excelled at Tennis. Hugh was employed between 1938/9 at the Highland Golf Club, probably as a Caddie and also at the London Ontario Winery.



1934 Junior Rugby Team

*Hugh Reilley, middle row, second from left, his friend
Bert Bucannan, front row, far left.*

In May 1939 (age 21) he and his friend Bert Bucannan (an RAF Coastal Command Pilot killed in July 1940) left from Montreal bound for England to join the RAF.

Hugh joined the RAF for training 20th. September 1939 and was given a short service Commission for 4 years as Acting Pilot Officer on probation in the General Duties Branch of the RAF Volunteer Reserve. He married Margery "Molly" Etta Fleming whom he had met at a Ball given by Lord Beverbrook in London. His address at the time was No.2 F.T.S. Brize Norton, Oxfordshire.

On the Marriage Certificate dated 20th. April 1940, he stated that his father was deceased but gave his occupation as a "Government Transport Inspector". They had a son, Christopher Hugh Reilley, who was born on 24th September, 1940.



Hugh and Molly's wedding day, 20th April 1940

On the 10th. August 1940 Hugh was graded as a pilot Officer on Probation. He was subsequently posted to 64 Squadron at Leaconfield, Yorks in early September and moved to 66 Squadron at Gravesend on the 15th. From the date he joined an operational flying unit to the date he was shot down and killed was just over a month; from joining the RAF until his death was about 13 months.

During his service he claimed a damaged Messerschmitt Bf 109 on the 24th September, a half shared kill of a Heinkel 111 bomber (with his wing leader Bobby Oxspring) on 26th September 1940, and a kill of a Messerschmitt Bf. 109 fighter on the 27th. September.

Hugh was shot down in combat with German Fighter aircraft over Westerham, Kent on October 17th. 1940 and crashed near Crockham Hill, Sevenoaks, Kent where his aircraft was found burnt out. He had been flying Spitfire R6800.



Spitfire R6800 at Gravesend a few days before P.O Hugh Reilley was shot down in it on 17th October 1940

P/O Hugh Reilley's body was brought back to RAF Gravesend where he was buried with full Military Honours. Among the tributes was a floral wreath from the people of Gravesend inscribed with the following words:

"To a Canadian airman who gave his life the service of the Empire, from the people of Gravesend, with profound sympathy and gratitude"

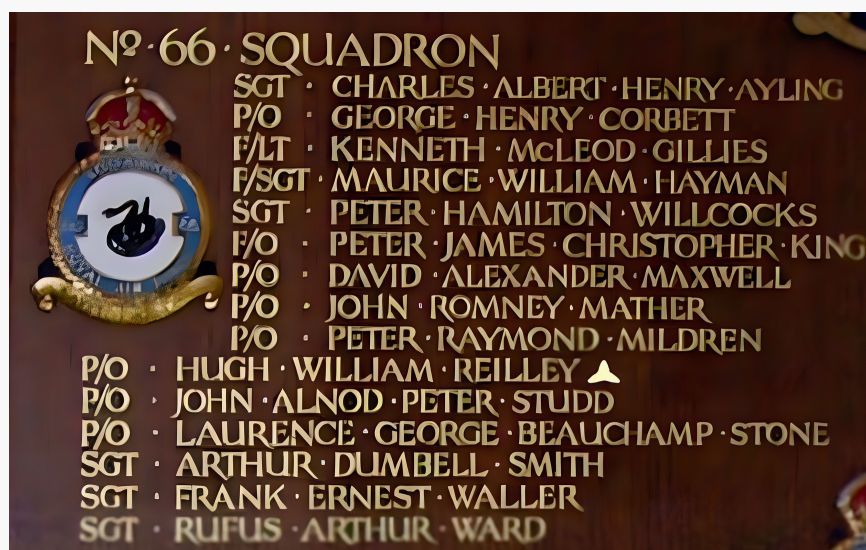
The internment was in Gravesend Cemetery, Plot B, Grave 1271.



Christopher Reilley visiting his father's grave at Gravesend Cemetery



*All information contained here gleaned from
articles published by Christopher Hugh Reilly.
hughreilly.blogspot.co.uk*



*Pilot Officer Hugh William Reilley is also commemorated at
St George's Royal Air Force Chapel of Remembrance - Biggin Hill*



With thanks to:



Henry Warde, Squerryes Court, Westerham
www.squerryes.co.uk



Geoff Nutkins, Shoreham Aircraft Museum
www.shoreham-aircraft-museum.co.uk



Steve Doyle, AD Construction Group
www.theadgroup.co.uk



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