

## **Richard Murray Weidenhofer**

Born 4 June 1922 in Pennington, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia,

Died 30 January 1994 in Mount Gambier, South Australia, Australia.

The Weidenhofer name was changed in about 1936/37

He married, 4 June 1948 in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia,

## **June Butterworth**

Born 4 June 1925 in Bairnsdale, Victoria, Australia.

"A History of the Weidenhofer Families in Australia 1846 - 2004. Written by Wyn Allen (née Weidenhofer) 2004 ©."

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Richard, the first child of Bert and Sarah, was born in 1922 at Pennington near Port Adelaide.

Although Bert and Sarah lived at Ponde, Sarah returned to her mother's home for the births of her four children.

At the age of fourteen, Richard left school and found work on a dairy farm at Purnong, on the River Murray, north of Mannum.

In 1940, aged eighteen, he joined the Royal Australian Air Force, and began his training at Victor Harbor, south of Adelaide. The next I.T.S (Initial Training School) was at Temora in New South Wales, where he learnt to fly Tiger Moth planes. At Deniliquin, also in New South Wales he trained on Wirraways, graduating as a fighter pilot in July 1942.

A few months later he sailed to America, crossing the country by train and finally travelled to England on the Queen Elizabeth, a luxury passenger liner, which had been converted to a troop-carrying ship. There were few luxuries for the troops on board. The cabins were fitted with three tier bunks and because of the large number of men on board, only two meals were served each day.

Richard, with many other Australian airmen, was based at Bournemouth on the south coast of England, where they were trained to fly Spitfires and Hurricane bomber planes. Richard's ability was rated as "above average". Whilst on leave in Bournemouth, Richard and some of his mates were celebrating a birthday at a hotel, when they heard the unmistakable sound of an enemy plane flying overhead.

Richard headed for the door as a bomb scored a direct hit on the hotel. He and his mates, at that time were on the second floor of the building, but were buried in the cellar under tons of rubble. Richard regained consciousness to feel someone squeezing his toes, which he immediately wriggled, hearing a voice saying "Here's another one!" Richard and one of his mates were the only two survivors of the raid.

Sometime later, a policeman hearing of Richard's lucky escape, presented him with a piece of metal taken from the wreck of the plane which had bombed the hotel and was almost immediately shot down.

In 1944 Richard was posted to 111 Squadron of the Royal Air Force (British) flying to France and the island of Sardinia in Italy. As a fighter/bomber pilot he flew about 70 operations, mainly in support of Canadian, New Zealand and British armed forces in the northern parts of Italy. After the end of the war, the Squadron spent a short time at Klaegenfurst in Austria. There was a very strong bond of friendship amongst the crews of the Squadron – Australians, Canadians, British and South Africans – and over the years

since the war, many poignant reunions have been held.

After returning home in 1946, Richard lived with his parents at the Eden Valley Hotel, at which time Richard, known as Dick, met June Butterworth who was a nurse at the nearby hospital at Mt Pleasant.

Both of them had birthdays on 4 June, so it was on that day in 1948 that Richard and June were married in Melbourne.

Richard applied for a grant of land in the Soldier Settlement Scheme and was offered a ninety acre block at Eight Mile Creek in the south-east of South Australia, near the Victorian border. The area was covered by ti-tree bushes, which were about the only form of vegetation that thrived in the peat soil, which absorbed the rainwater.

First the land had to be drained by digging channels which carried the water to the nearby coast. Then the peat had to be cleared to allow fodder crops to be grown to feed the dairy herd, which Richard had established. One problem, which could not be solved, was the constant strong south-westerly winds which blew salt laden rain across the land.

June and Richard battled with the elements for almost twenty years before moving to Mt Gambier, the nearest large town where their four children had been born.

Richard found employment in Borthwick's Meat Works and June returned to nursing at the Mt Gambier Hospital.

Richard did not talk about his wartime experiences to anyone in the family, except his son-in-law, Andy Lott, who lives in the Riverland near Renmark. Andy recalls that, in 1976, (thirty years beyond the time when Richard had last flown a plane) he offered Richard the control of his (Andy's) plane. Despite the difference in the speed and mechanics of the more modern planes, Richard had "not lost his touch".

Richard died in 1994 but June continues to live in Mt Gambier, keeping in touch with her daughter and three sons who live in various parts of Australia