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# Biography of REGINALD LEIGH DENNY

November 20, 1891 – June 16, 1967

Transcribed by NR (8/01)

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## Career:

- Famous actor of screen and stage
- Designed and sold the concept for a Radio Controlled drone to the military
- Manufactured and sold the Dennykite Airstream model engine
- Owned and operated a model hobby shop on Hollywood Boulevard in California

## Honors:

- 1983 – National Free Flight Society Hall of Fame
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*The following information about Reginald Denny was written by James Bennett.*

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Reginald Leigh Denny was born November 20, 1891 in Richmond, Surrey, England. His father was a member of the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera. Reginald attended St. Francis Xavier College in Mayfield, Sussex, and passed the Oxford exams. He joined a stage group, became an actor and in 1912 toured the U.S., India and parts of the Orient. Also he sang baritone as a member of the Bandman Opera Company. In 1917 he joined the Royal Air Force. During his two-year enlistment he became the brigade heavyweight-boxing champion. After the war he entered motion pictures and appeared in a long list of films including "China Clipper." His home in Hollywood was at 2060 N. Vine Street.



An early member of the National Aeronautics Association (NAA, later to become the Academy of Model Aeronautics or the AMA), he flew full-scale, and started a model airplane shop on Hollywood Boulevard. He designed and built a six-foot span, boxy looking cabin plane with the appearance of a Howard DGA. The model, called Denny Jr., was featured in the May 1937 issue of Model Airplane News magazine. The ad included a picture of 10-year-old Jane Withers with the plane.

The kit was marketed by Reginald Denny Industries, and for \$25 you received a Gwin Aero engine (or a Mighty Midget), a spun aluminum cowl, a finished prop, cut out ribs, air wheels, motor mount, cement, dope and silk. The kit sold for \$10 without engine.

Early in 1937 he announced a design competition for an engine requiring a 50-hour, continuous operation, full throttle, qualification test. Walter Righter, an engine designer, (Cal Tech, class of 1928) submitted 10 prototypes and passed the test. This 0.9-inch bore and stroke engine of 0.57 cubic inch displacement became the Dennykite Special. The engine produced ¼-horsepower at 6,500 rpm. It was priced at \$16.50 with coil and condenser. In 1938, the Dennykite Airstream

with streamlined cooling fins was produced. It was this engine that was chosen to power the Comet Kit of the Zipper. It was estimated the engine had three pounds thrust, thus a potential for a vertical climb.

Reginald Denny Industries produced Radio Controlled (RC) target planes for the military from 1942 to 1945. Engines for the planes were built in the plant that produced the Dennymite.

Reginald Denny returned to England in retirement. He died June 16, 1967 in his home village of Richmond at age 75.

Denny was the builder of models for the movie studios. He produced the Jimmie Allen series of kits for Hearst newspapers and also produced many beginners' kits. His hobby shop and kits were introduced to the public through newsreels in the days when every movie was preceded by Movietone news. Reginald did a tour of the country judging contests and promoting model airplanes. He had a full-page ad on his products in the Montgomery Ward catalog in 1937. General MacArthur ordered one for his son.

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*The following information was taken from another source. Unfortunately no record was kept as to where the information was collected or who wrote it.*

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Reginald Denny, actor. (born November 20, 1891, Richmond, Surrey, England, as Reginald Leigh Daymore; died June 16, 1967) Remembered by many as one of the screen's typical "silly-ass" Englishmen, a characterization Denny popularized as Algy in Paramount's "Bulldog Drummond" movies. He was also a top silent star, equally at home with drawing-room comedy and action-packed melodrama.

In the sound era, his cultured voice and British accent limited his choice of roles, but he continued to deliver fine performances, often as stuffy Brits. Kids who grew up in Hollywood in decades past know him more as the owner of Reginald Denny's Hobby Shop, an extremely popular Hollywood Boulevard store for model kits and the like.

Handsome and athletic, with expressive, pale eyes and a square jaw, Denny achieved stardom as a boxer in Universal's "Leather Pushers" series during the 1920s, and made more than a dozen light domestic comedies, including "Skinner's Dress Suit" (1925), before American moviegoers had any idea he came from England.

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*The following information on the Radioplane Target Drone was taken from [http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/early\\_years/ey16c.htm](http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/early_years/ey16c.htm).*

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## **Radioplane RP-5A (OQ-2, TDD-1) Target Drone**

In the mid-1930s, RC model airplanes became the basis for the Army Air Corps' development of the aerial targets for antiaircraft gunnery training. Starting in 1935, the Radioplane Company in California developed several variations of an original design by former movie star and modeler,

Reginald Denny. The OQ-2A was successful enough to generate contracts for almost 1,000 targets in 1943.

The OQ-2A was catapult-launched and was recovered under a 24-foot diameter parachute. Conventional landing gear cushioned the landing impact. After launch, gunnery target missions were flown by a ground controller using a “beep” box, so called because of the tones transmitted to the target’s control system.

The craft’s small engine drove two coaxial, contra-rotating propellers. A skilled operator could duplicate fighter attack tactics for training gunners in all anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) weapons calibers up to 40mm.

While Radioplane developed the OQ-2A, other companies shared in production contracts. The target was the last in the 1943 production run by the Frankfort Sailplane Company of Joliet, Illinois. It was donated in 1970 by John C. Smith of Massillon, Ohio.

The U.S. Army called it the OQ-2A and OQ-2B, while the U.S. Navy called it the TDD-1, which stood for “Target Drone, Denny.” No matter what they were called, the RP-5A, OQ-2 and TDD-1 were very effective anti-aircraft training target drones. Up to the introduction of these small target drones, the anti-aircraft gunnery crews target practice was limited to shooting at towed target sleeves. The use of the sleeves had numerous drawbacks: (1) they flew only in straight lines, (2) they didn't look like airplanes, (3) during a target run, the crews could not tell whether or not the sleeve had been hit and (4) the danger of hitting the tow aircraft was always there.

The forerunners of modern target drones and RPVS, these midget RC aircraft gave the anti-aircraft gunnery crews just what they needed for target practice. First of all, these were targets that looked like aircraft, sounded like aircraft and flew like full-size aircraft. They could even simulate attack maneuvers!

Reginald Denny, the Hollywood movie star was a multi-talented aviation enthusiast. Denny demonstrated his first RC drone the RP-1 to the U.S. Army in 1935. In 1938 the RP-2 was demonstrated. A year later in 1939 the RP-3 was built. Only one each of the first three types was built.

In November of 1939, the RP-4 prototype was completed. The U.S. Army ordered 53 of these drones, giving them the designation of OQ-1. The U.S. Air Force supported Denny’s efforts to prove the practicality of the target drone aircraft. The Radioplane RP-5A (OQ-2, TDD-1) started rolling off the production line at the San Fernando Valley Airport in June of 1941. Radioplane produced a total of 14,891 drones for the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy from 1941 through 1945.

In 1952, Radioplane became the Radioplane Division of Northrop Aircraft, Inc. Later the Radioplane Division became known as the Ventura Division, Northrop Corporation. Reginald Denny died June 16, 1967, at the age of 75.

The Radioplane RP-5A was donated to the Western Museum of Flights by the Northrop Ventura Division. The aircraft bears the tail number of 248. A total of 3,865 of this series of drones were produced.

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*The following specifications of the Radioplane were taken from  
[http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/rpav\\_radioplane.html](http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/rpav_radioplane.html).*

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### **Radioplane RP-5A (OQ-2, TDD-1) Specifications**

**Wingspan:** 146.7 inches

**Overall Length:** 104.3 inches

**Gross Weight:** 104 pounds

**Maximum Speed:** 85 mph

**Wing Loading:** 6.12 pounds/square foot

**Wing Area:** 19.24 square feet

**Power Loading:** 17.3 pounds/horse power

**Fuel Tank:** 1.8 U.S. gallons

**Flight Duration:** one hour, 10 minutes

**First Production:** June 1941

**Total Produced:** 3,865 units

**Engine Righter Type:** 0-1 5-1, two-cylinder, two-cycle

**Engine Weight:** 26.5 pounds

**Horsepower:** 6-horse power at 3,800 rpm

**Displacement:** 16.9 cubic inches

**Fuselage:** Welded steel tubing

**Propeller:** Two concentrically shafted, counter-rotating, two-bladed, 26-inch wood

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*The following information was taken from  
<http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Galaxy/4707/nostalgia/RDmodelshop.htm>.*

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An aviator in World War I, Reginald Denny began an acting career in England when the war ended. Sometimes he played the sidekick in the Bulldog Drummond series (along with – sigh – Heather Angel). He ultimately wrote screenplays, too, and finally came to Hollywood with many other English actors during the Great Depression.

After forming Denny Industries (a California Corporation) in 1934, he began selling his models at this location (*pictured in the photograph file*) in 1935 and Jay's Models on Melrose (just south of Hollywood). He also sold them nationally through the mail.

In 1938 he bought the rights to an engine design from Walter Righter, manufacturing and selling it as the Dennymite. He kept the shop open until around 1963 when it was sold to Colonel Tom's, further south in West Los Angeles.

Sadly, today on this same corner you can only score some recreational drugs, get panhandled or engage a prostitute.

**Additional Information**

At the time this biography was originally compiled in 2001, additional information on Reginald Denny could be found on the following Internet Web sites:

<http://www.wmof.com/rp5a.htm>

<http://www.aviation.nmstc.ca/Eng/Collection/sd102e.htm>

<http://www.hollywood.com/celebs/detail/celeb/198277>

<http://www.wmof.com/sc9606.htm>

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# Photographs of REGINALD LEIGH DENNY

November 20, 1891 – June 16, 1967

## 1 hr. 47 min. Flight

N. A. A. OFFICIALLY-TIMED



**THE FAMOUS DENNY PLANE JR. FLOWN BY REGINALD DENNY, THE FAMOUS SCREEN STAR**

*Flight begun with 8 oz. of gas and when ship was grounded by mountain collision motor was still running and 3 oz. of gas remained.*

Span—6 ft. Weight—complete with motor—3 lbs. Here is a model that will give you everything you want in a gas model!—Looks! Strength! Light weight! Real performance! The Kit for this famous model is complete in every detail—real air-wheels, finished aluminum cowl, cut-out ribs, 1/2 pt. cement, 1 qt. dope, silk covering, as well as plenty of wood, metals, etc. to build the **\$10.00** best looking, finest performing gas model you ever saw! Complete kit with full size plans and instructions..... \$10.00 Post-paid Plans, wing ribs and spars only..... \$3.75

### CHRISTMAS SPECIAL!

Take advantage of this real money-saving offer!

1 DENNY PLANE JR. KIT	\$10.00
1 GWIN AERO MOTOR	\$17.50
1 PROPELLER	\$2.00
Total cash value	\$29.50
<b>ALL FOR ONLY</b>	<b>\$25.00</b>
<b>YOU SAVE</b>	<b>\$ 4.50!</b>



**WE ARE HEAD-QUARTERS FOR THE MOTORS LISTED BELOW—QUICK SERVICE.**  
 Baby Cyclone..... \$15.75  
 Gwin Aero..... \$17.50  
 Brown Jr..... \$21.50  
 Mighty Midget Kit..... \$ 9.85  
 Cleveland "Tom Thumb" Assembled..... \$17.50  
 Kit..... \$9.75

**FREE! WITH EVERY MOTOR ORDERED THIS MONTH A PROPELLER—WORTH—\$2.00!**

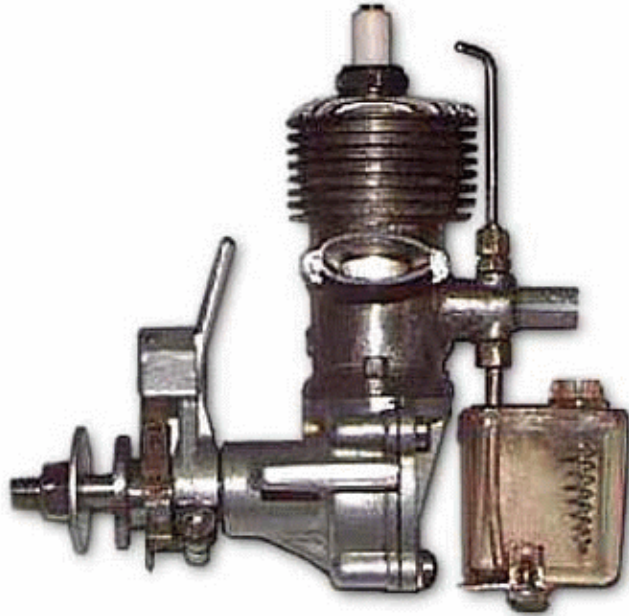
Send 3c stamp for catalogue of gas model kits, motors, supplies.

DEALERS—Write for wholesale prices on motors and kits.

**JAY'S MODEL SHOP**

7763 Melrose (Dept. M-4) HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

This ad ran in Model Airplane News magazine in December 1936. It was taken from <http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Galaxy/4707/nostalgia/Rdmodelshop.htm>.



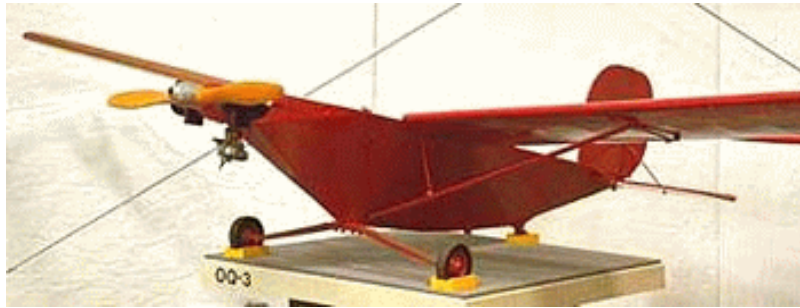
Circa 1938 – Denny Airstream, 5.7-cubic inches disp. Cast iron cylinder had teardrop shaped fins.



This is a photo of Denny's hobby shop that was taken in 1961. The shop was located on Hollywood Boulevard and came from <http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Galaxy/4707/nostalgia/Rdmodelshop.htm>.







This is Denny's Radioplane OQ-3 Target Drone. The photograph was taken from [http://www.ctie.monash.edu/au/hargrave/rpav\\_radioplane.html](http://www.ctie.monash.edu/au/hargrave/rpav_radioplane.html).



This signed photograph was taken from [http://www.ctie.monash.edu/au/hargrave/rpav\\_radioplane.html](http://www.ctie.monash.edu/au/hargrave/rpav_radioplane.html).

MODEL AIRPLANE NEWS JANUARY 1

**REGINALD DENNY**  
Proudly Presents  
*the 1937*  
**Dennyplanes**



**THE CUSTOM-BILT DENNYPLANE**

We spent two years designing and experimenting with this model. It is now the most completely engineered kit on the market today. Not only does it LOOK like a real plane -- it has



This ad ran in Model Airplane News magazine in January 1937 and is taken from <http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Galaxy/4707/nostalgia/Rdmodelshop.htm>.

