



Reginald Denny – Actor – 186 Films [and WW1 Inventor]

## Biography

Born	November 20, 1891 in Richmond, Surrey, England, UK
Died	June 16, 1967 in Richmond, Surrey, England, UK (stroke)
Birth Name	Reginald Leigh Dugmore
Height	6' (1.83 m)

Acting was in the blood for Reginald Denny. He came from an acting family, his father being stage actor/singer W.H. Denny, a member of the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company. The younger Denny had made his stage debut at 6 years old, but his future was not yet set in that direction. His schooling continued through attendance at Clapham College and later at St. Francis Xavier College in Mayfield, Sussex, and he did pass the Oxford exams. However, at that point he moved into acting, though he had come to the US with his family in 1908 to act in the play "The Quaker Girl". Cutting a dashing figure with his athletic good looks, he joined a stage troupe in 1912 that toured the US, India and parts of the Far East. He made his film debut in 1912 and appeared in several British pictures. Possessed of a fine baritone voice, he also toured with the Bandmann Opera Company. He liked what he had seen of the US and returned in 1915, making his debut in American films that year.

In 1917 Denny joined the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot and remained for two years, during which he became the brigade heavyweight-boxing champion. He took his acting and flying experiences with him back to Hollywood, where he settled in 1919 and where his film career took off in earnest. He became somewhat of a fixture in American films of the silent era, appearing in nearly 60 pictures--from comedies to dramas--and played everything from action hero to strait-laced British nobility. In several films he worked as a stunt pilot, and in the Universal Pictures action series The Leather Pushers (1922) he showed his boxing ability in the lead role. It was not until 1929 and his first role in a mono picture--silent but with limited sound effects and dialog--that the public realized he was British. His pleasant voice and crystal-clear diction enabled him to transition easily from silent films to "talkies", and in fact one of his early films was The Voice of Hollywood No. 3 (1930), series of filmed radio shows.

Denny's accent was a pleasant one to hear occasionally but too markedly British to allow him the full range of lead parts he had in silent films (not to mention that he was, of course, older). Though there was no lack of roles, his earlier "B" leads became "A" supporting and character parts as the 1930s progressed into the war years. Unfortunately, he is most remembered for stereotypical Brit characters and he played English gentleman twit Algy Longworth in the Bulldog Drummond series (1937-1939). Even those stock roles, however, couldn't hide Denny's depth as an actor. His sturdy physique and healthy face could fit all occasions, from part of the ensemble film The Lost Patrol (1934) with Victor McLaglen to a memorable second lead to Leslie Howard in the powerful Of Human Bondage (1934), featuring an incredible performance by Bette Davis. His theatre experience showed well in the gorgeously filmed Romeo and Juliet (1936) as a versatile Benvolio to Leslie Howard (again) as Romeo. Another outstanding role he played that showed his range of subtle emotion was that of lawyer/friend Frank Crawley to Laurence Olivier as disturbed Maxim de Winter in Rebecca (1940).

Perhaps Denny was not too concerned with the levelling off of his film career, for he was busy elsewhere. He became interested in model plane building--and, particularly, the potential of radio-controlled model planes--in the early 1930s and embarked on a surprising second career as something of an aviation pioneer in drone technology. Along with this serious business of controlled aircraft, Denny opened a model shop in 1935 on the north side of Hollywood Boulevard called Reginald Denny's Model Shop (he lived nearby at 2060 N.

Vine St.). The newsreel cameras were close behind, providing publicity for the shop and the models via Movietone shorts. He was also featured in magazines catering to model-airplane hobbyists and other enthusiast magazines. Along with the model kits (many rubber band-powered but also some powered by gas engines) developed by his company, Denny sold a great variety of model items, and his shop was, to say the least, a popular hangout for boys in the area for several generations (though others eventually took over the aviation interest and the shop). Denny was himself a consummate modeler of great skill who built at least one special example of his large one-engine "Dennyplane" for Robert Montgomery. He had a full range of merchandise in the 1937 Montgomery Ward's catalogue, and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, among others, ordered one of his model planes for his young son. Denny enthusiastically promoted his hobby passion with tours over the country to judge models and competitions.

Although Denny's film work continued into the late 1940s, by the 1950s he became a familiar face in television, especially the genre of TV playhouse fare, where he could still do some serious acting. However, he was also quite well known for his appearances in sitcom and dramatic series.

Reginald Denny was a man whose contributions to the history of film led to yet other contributions far afield of stage and screen--and perhaps just as satisfying.

### Spouse (2)

Betsy Lee	(24 November 1928 - 16 June 1967) (his death) (3 children)
Irene Haisman	(18 January 1913 - 23 November 1928) (divorced) (1 child)

### Trivia (6)

Founder of Radioplane, maker of military target drones.

Owned hobby shop on Hollywood Blvd. specializing in RC model planes.

Brother of actor Malcolm Denny.

Near the end of WWII, Reg Denny gave permission for a war industry photo shoot at his Radioplane plant.

The event would have passed without notice except for a pretty young employee who became a magnet for the photographers. Recognizing her potential, she was brought to the attention of some Hollywood types who agreed to give her a try. It was then that Norma Jeane Mortensen was able to leave what she would later say was "the hardest work she ever had to do" to begin a Hollywood career. Of course, we know her today by her screen name, Marilyn Monroe.

He appeared in two Best Picture Academy Award winners: *Rebecca* (1940) and *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956). Melville Cooper also appeared in both films. Reginald also appears in one other Best Picture nominated film: *Romeo and Juliet* (1936).

Father was singer and actor W.H. Denny.