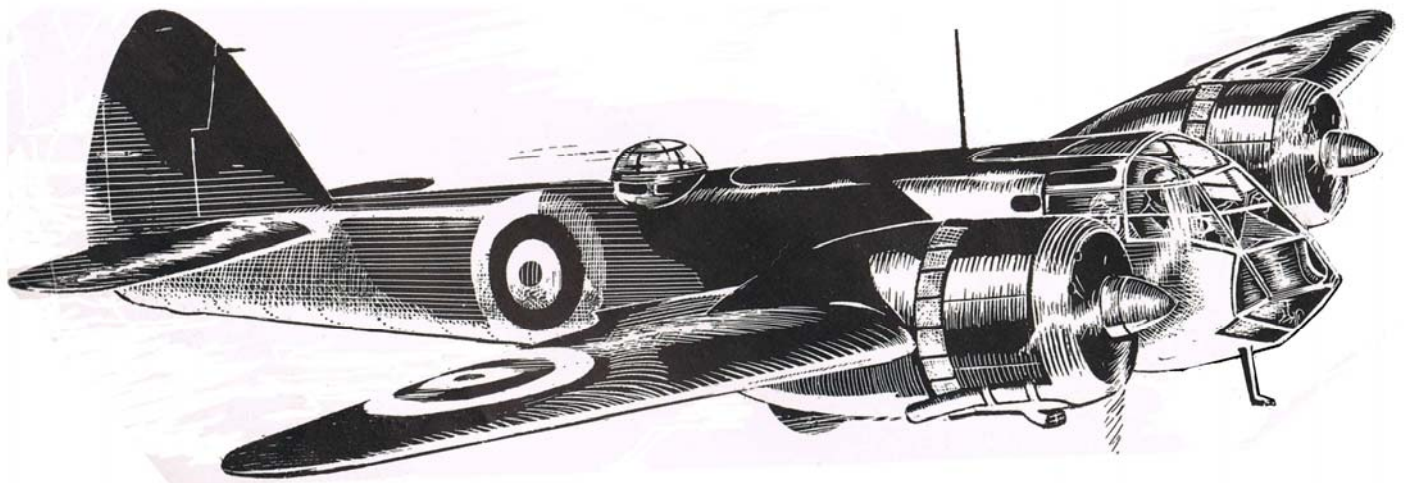


WEST ESSEX AVIATION

CRASHES & MISHAPS

3

WORLD WAR 2



WEST ESSEX AVIATION

CRASHES & MISHAPS

EXPANSION AND WAR 1939 - 1940

As the Royal Air Force and other military arms rapidly expanded in the late 1930s, the numbers of reported crashes rose rapidly.

February 4, 1939.

The prototype of the monoplane Bristol Bombay bomber-transport, the Bristol 130, K3583, forced landed at Chigwell according to those historical documents that bother to mention the incident at all. Such forced landings were not an unfamiliar occurrence up until the end of the 1939-45 war, the performance of the machines and the lay of the land still allowed for safe landings and take-off to be performed.

The Bristol 130, constructors number 7809, first flew from the company airfield at Filton, Bristol on June 23, 1935. With a wing span of 96 feet it was the largest aircraft the company had built to date, but not, by far the largest type then flying in the world. Its size did however preclude landings in some fields that might offer themselves in an emergency. On this occasion in early 1939 the 27 seat 130 was able to land safely in a field presently bordered by Forest Road, Roebuck Road and Fowler Road, Redbridge. The description given in the history books - of Chigwell - is incorrect by a matter of a few dozen yards.

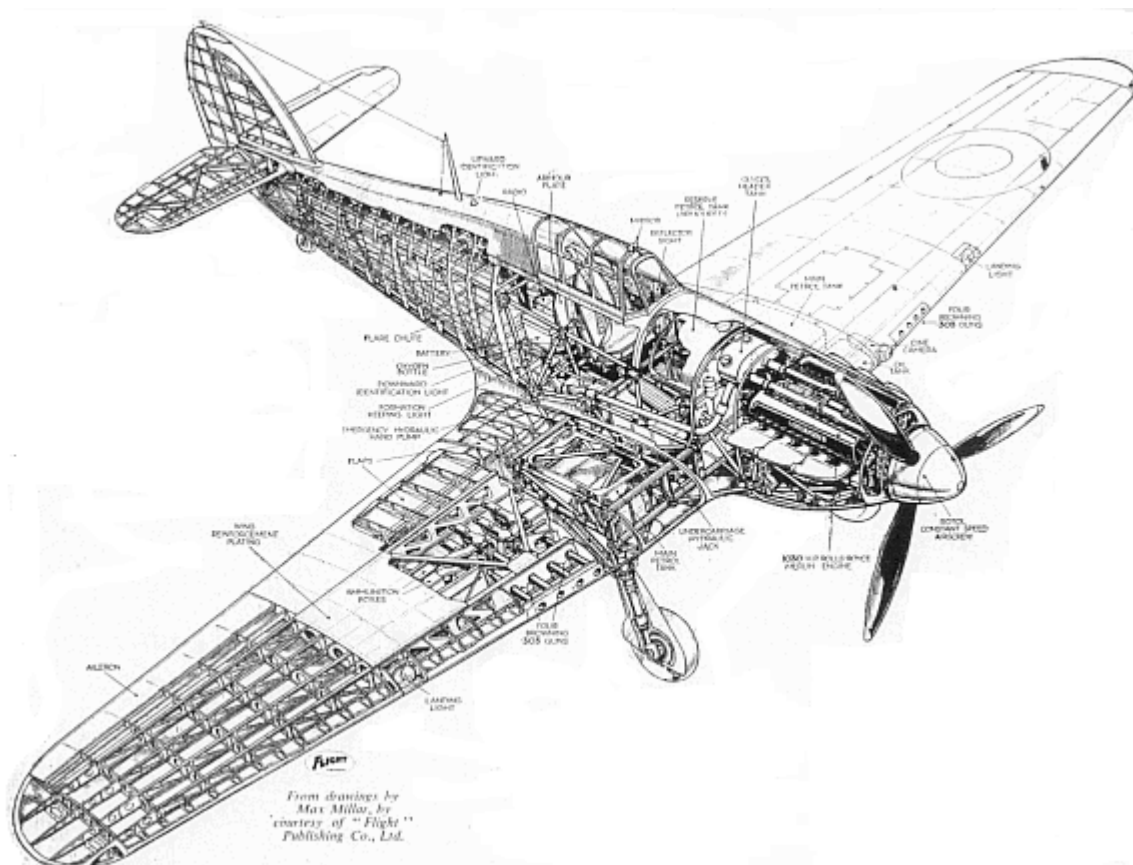
Having landed, without further damage, repaired the fault, and prepared to return to the air, it was sheer bad luck that followed. As the 130 lumbered into a turn at the end of the field nearest the Hainault Forest, preparatory to a take off towards the west, the large fixed undercarriage collapsed. The aircraft was dismantled and removed by road.

Reports on the fate of the aircraft vary. One line of opinion states that the machine was not rebuilt after the mishap, another that a firm sighting was made of the aircraft at Filton, Bristol in the early war years wearing camouflage colours.

A major requirement at this period was to train and bring into service sufficient pilots and warplanes to ensure the safety of the United Kingdom in the future. An inevitable by product of this intensive training were the accidents. Within the 'District the main aircraft to crash in the late peace and early war years were Hawker Hurricane's which equipped the two North Weald squadrons (initially 56 and 151 squadrons). Often these were not particularly serious accidents, a number have been included merely to illustrate the type of crash and, more particularly, the characters involved. Unfortunately some of them were met again in far more serious incidents, accidents from which they would not walk away Scot-free.

February 29, 1939 on the airfield at North Weald involved a fairly serious incident with Hawker Hurricane L1754. As the machine came into land the aircraft stalled at a height estimated as 10 feet crashed down, collapsing the under-carriage. The aircraft, delivered only in December of the previous year was relegated to use as a ground instructional airframe with a new identity of 1424M. Its later fate is unknown.

March 20, 1939, brought about another fairly minor incident that, almost by default, ended up being an airfield crash as well as the creation of another instructional airframe from a young machine. Hurricane L1745 was operating with others in formation flying in



the vicinity of the airfield when its Rolls-Royce Merlin engine failed. The young pilot on this occasion was Pilot Officer 40724 H A Lovell who then only had 34 hours flying experience in Hurricane's, having received his pilots wings only the same month. Although he attempted to reach the grass runway of North Weald it became clear

that the aircraft had insufficient height in hand. Turning to avoid a building, Lovell attempted to retract the undercarriage but hit a tree with one wingtip causing the crash. The Hurricane became 1439M. Less than a year later young Lovell was to die in a tragic accident near Waltham Abbey.

April 14, 1939.

Night flying practice on the evening of April 14-15, 1939 brought about damage to two Hurricane aircraft of 151 squadron as they worked up their operational efficiency. In this particular instance there was no direct connection between the pair of machines and pilots. The squadron was making landings by the poor illumination of "Goose Flares" - a fairly inadequate device as far as light output is concerned, just sufficient to indicate the whereabouts of the airfields landing area.

L1753, flown by Pilot Officer C F Atkinson was the first combination to experience just how tricky flying at night could be. The Hurricane literally flew into the ground on the edge of the airfield, causing the undercarriage to collapse.

L1767, flown by Acting Pilot Officer R N H Courtney, a 19 years old pilot with 48 hours on the type, failed to reach the airfield. Undershooting, the aircraft hit trees some 600 yards short of the first flare.

April 20, 1939. Another minor event is worth recording mainly because one of its participants will appear later - twice. Pilot Officer J H L Allen of 151 squadron the pilot of Hurricane L1758 whilst manoeuvring on the ground at North Weald managed to collide with, and slightly damage, another Hurricane L1724. Neither aircraft was severely damaged.

May 25, 1939

A de Havilland Tiger Moth, L6947, attached to 21 ERFTS (Elementary & Reserve Flying Training School) crashed on take off from Stapleford.

June 12, 1939.

In case the impression be given that only 151 squadron were having difficulties at this stage in their training, 56 Squadron were involved in a fatal mishap between two of their Hurricane's in early June. L1598, piloted by a new member of the squadron, 23 year old Pilot Officer Peter Phillip Charlton, having only accrued 39 hours on the type, was in formation with L1611 flown by Pilot Officer Montague Leslie Hulton-Harrap and another Hurricane flown by P/O Derrick MacLoad Down.

During formation flying two aircraft collided, Charlton having accidentally approached Hulton-Harrap's machine from the rear blind spot. Charlton and his aircraft spun into the ground near the airfield, whilst that of the more senior pilot was able to return safely the land.

The site of the crash of L1598 was given as Epping Forest, close to the London-Newmarket road and the Essex Yeomanry Camp. This is believed to be Wintry Wood, where a Hurricane, otherwise unidentified, is known to have come to grief. Charlton died in hospital.

Hulton-Harrap was killed a few months later, accidentally shot down by Spitfire's in the infamous 'Battle of Barking Creek'. During the following year, until it was struck of RAF charge in May 1940, the other Hurricane in the collision, L1611, served with three other squadrons - 17, 605 and 253.

July 9, 1939

A Bristol Blenheim of 25 squadron, L1423, swung on take off from North Weald and crashed.

July 27, 1939

A Supermarine Spitfire 1, K9913, of 65 squadron crashed on take-off from Hornchurch. The aircraft was beyond full repair and was consigned to technical training duties as 1632M.

August 15, 1939, just a fortnight before the declaration of war, an aircraft that was six months later to be destroyed in an accident, suffered a minor mishap on the airfield. Hurricane L1724, attached to 151 squadron, being flown by P/O J H L Allen, suffered failure of its Rolls Royce Merlin engine. As it was brought onto the airfield, Allen braked too harshly and the machine ended up on its nose. The damage was very minor.

November 6, 1939.

It was again 151 squadron that suffered the next, fortunately fairly minor, incident in the vicinity of North Weald. Hurricane L1606 had been involved in air firing exercises on Monday November 6., coming to grief on its return.

In heavy rain Pilot officer R N Courtney deliberately brought the aircraft into a wheels up landing from the north of the airfield. Unfortunately, at a distance of about one-mile from the airfield threshold, the poor visibility afforded by the weather caused Courtney to misjudge his line and the Hurricane hit trees. In the resulting crash little damage, besides dented pride, was done to the pilot. The aircraft was wrecked.

November 16, 1939

A 600 squadron Bristol Blenheim, L6685, swung and crashed on take off from Hornchurch.

November 29, 1939.

In addition to the Hawker Hurricane squadrons stationed at North Weald, the airfield was host to a number of passing communications and training aircraft and a squadron of night

fighters. The night fighter element consisted of twin engine Bristol Blenheim aircraft not possessing any more superior night flying aids than those fitted into the Hurricane's excepting a second engine and crew member.

From September 1939 the 'night fighter' squadron allotted to the Essex airfield was 604, equipped with the short nosed mark 1 Blenheim. L6601 was one of their aircraft.

The pilot on that evening, Flying Officer P C Wheeler, aged 29, was a pre-war member of the Auxiliary Air Force. Gaining his pilot's brevet in late July 1936 he had accumulated 386 hours of flying time, 59 of which were on the Blenheim. The purpose of the evening flight was to train for night fighting. The other, rear seat, member of the two-man crew was LAC Vernon

The engines started normally. The Blenheim moved out and took off towards Epping town (in those days the runways were still grass, allowing most permutations in take off and landing direction). The aircraft was flying at around 1,000 feet over Bell Common, to the south of Epping in a steep climb when it fell sharply into fields near the modern motorway tunnel mouth.

The subsequent Court of Enquiry found that Flying Officer Wheeler, whilst undertaking a turn in particularly dark conditions, lost sight of ground references, due partly to the surrounding bulk of the pair of engines, allowing the aircraft to enter a steeper than usual wing down attitude and lose height.

Witnesses on the ground, including a Mrs Church of Nazeing, thought they saw signs of engine problems prior to the crash. Such a matter, if the RAF had known it, may have resulted in a slightly different result but was of little real consequence in wartime.

Blenheim L6601 was built by A V Roe and delivered to 24MU on November 17, 1938 prior to issue to 604 squadron on June 21 the following year. At the time of its loss it was a little over one year old.



A continued mystery...

At around this same period a crash occurred on the edge of Epping Forest - not far away from the site of the Blenheim crash - an incident which has remained somewhat of a mystery in spite of research.

It is known that an aircraft crashed during the war in an area of Epping Forest called St Thomas' Quarters, Lodge Road, Waltham Abbey, close to the gates of the derelict Copt Hall at Crown Hill, Upshire on a wet afternoon prior to April 1940. The, then, sole living witness to this incident, Frederick Hook of Monkwood Avenue, Waltham Abbey, served as a War Reserve Constable until that date. Fred went up to the scene with two other officers of the regular police force, the late Sergeant Fenner being one of these.

At the time of their arrival - at the behest of a telephone call from the constantly manned sandbagged police telephone box situated near the 'Wake Arms' junction - the aircraft lay burning to the east of lodge Road. The pilot had just managed to escape from his machine prior to impact and lay, seemingly mortally injured, across from his machine on the other side of the roadway. His partially deployed parachute was tangled in the treetops, suspending him below. It was be-



Sergeant Fenner on a bicycle approaching the Police Box at the Wake Arms junction in 1940.

Mystery surrounds a crash that took place around that time at a spot in the background. [WAPHC]

lieved that he died as the RAF rescue tenders arrived from North Weald but no record of them being sent has been found.

No record of a death to a RAF pilot exists in local records to account for this supposed fatality. However it is not unreasonable to assume that the pilot merely passed out when last seen by Mr. Hook, either living on or dying at some hospital outside the locality.

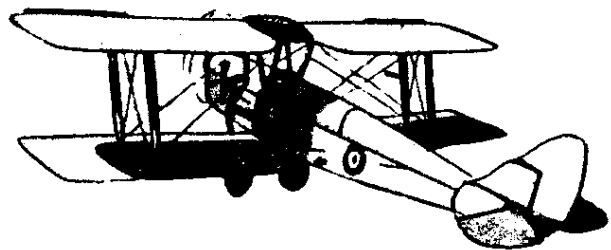
Although the machine was recalled later as a Spitfire, none of the surviving records have been able to support this assertion. Likewise in relation to 'look alike' single seat types such as the Hurricane which were more likely to be in the area.

A usual line of enquiry lies with the Epping Forest Authorities who retain some historical references. Unfortunately the 'Beat Books' for the area and date were amongst those destroyed some time back.

There is a fair amount of circumstantial evidence to support the crash of some type at the stated location. Fifty years after the event an unnatural clearing existed in the section of St Thomas Quarters identified and there is clear damage to treetops opposite where the pilots canopy supposedly snagged. Certain aspects of this damage are suspicious (the existence of leaves on one of the broken sections) but these can be explained away if some leeway is allowed to the evidence.

December 3, 1939.

The wrecking of a de Havilland Tiger Moth, K2597, in a force landing near North Weald was an unremarkable incident. Pilot Officer A H H Garrad, 24 [Communications] Squadron from Hendon, a flier with 159 hours to his credit – including just 4 on the type – became lost in bad weather in the vicinity of North Weald. Unable to find the airfield, Garrad elected to set down upon an inviting area of land not far from the field. Unfortunately it turned out that the area was boggy and the aircraft was severely damaged.



Delivered from de Havilland to Henlow on January 22, 1932, the mortal remains of K2597 were finally scrapped at the end of April 1940. The pilot, Garrad, had by this time moved to fly Blenheim's with 248 squadron Coastal Command.

January 3, 1940

A Bristol Blenheim of 604 squadron forced landed near to North Weald. The aircraft, L8399, was wrecked.

The airfield at Maylands finally met its end on the night of Tuesday February 6, 1940. In spite of the lack of action reported by the defences that night a serious fire destroyed all that remained at the airfield, when a German aircraft jettisoned its bomb load of incendiaries so accurately as to hit every single aeronautical building on the site! Some doubt has been cast on the cause of the disaster, but the buildings and aircraft (including Gordon Dove G-AETU and ex-Hillman's Fox Moth G-ABVI) suffered all the same.

February 18, 1940.

Relatively few of the 'Phoney War' aircraft incidents have been fully documented as individual occurrences. Like the peacetime crashes, much of the interest is taken away from them by plentiful numbers of combat crashes in the southeast. Another reason for the lack of wreck archaeology relates to the known fact that the quiet nature of the times allowed recovery crews plenty of time to retrieve almost all parts at the time. Hawker Hurricane L1724 LZ*C of North Weald based 151 squadron which crashed on the outskirts of Waltham Abbey fell into this category.

The severe winter weather of 1939-40 served to halt any intentions of waging war in the European Theatre with any degree of ferocity by both the Allies and the Axis until spring. Few airfields were able to operate their aircraft on a regular basis. It was after a period of severe weather that 151 squadron put up a few aircraft to enable them to exercise both man and machine in the skies above the snow covered landscape.

Three of the machines airborne chose to take part in aerobatics in the vicinity of Waltham Abbey that Sunday afternoon. L1724 was flown that afternoon by P/O 40724 Harold Arthur Lovell, a 19-year-old who had been involved earlier in the year in another mishap. Born in April 1920, his parents lived at Leamington Avenue, Morden, Surrey. Since his earlier experience with the engine failure in another Hurricane he had managed to increase his flying hours considerably. A total of 308 hours flying was now credited to him - 136 of these being solo in the Hurricane.

The resultant free 'air show' that resulted from the practice interceptions undertaken by the three Hurricane's enthralled a number of the inhabitants on the east of the small town. It was not any sense of brilliance on the part of the performers, merely a combination of the warmth the flying instilled in a cold populace suffering from restrictions upon their heating and food with little else to divert their attention. Most of the flying, two against one, each taking turns, took place to the east by Honey lane but, at least once, the 'Vic' of fighters - inevitably reported as Spitfires - teamed up to swoop low across the town from west to east along the line of Greenfield Street and Farmhill.

When it was Lovell's turn to take the role as the enemy, to have his compatriots swoop upon him, an error of judgement turned the affair to tragedy. In his efforts to avoid the others Lovell rolled L1724 into a dive heading east, but failed to recover fully from the dive before striking a tree besides Honeylands, Honey Lane.

The collision with the tree robbed the Hurricane of flying speed. Not much further along Lovell hit the ground. It was 4pm. Contemporary reports state that the 19-year-old died instantly - as they might - we will never know. He was reputedly dead when the first potential rescuer got to his aircraft. Not a total wreck, but severely compressed by the tremendous G-force of the impact, there was no fire.

The debris from the smashed Hurricane, including a whole variety of panels and ammunition belts, were quickly snatched up by bands of unthinking youths. This activity gave the authorities dealing with the incident an additional headache. Their attempts to get to the aircraft were regularly being diverted to halt and retrieve bits. A legacy of the crash was that the line of oak trees that the machine ended up close to died before their time, probably poisoned by leaking fuel from the aircraft. The dead stump of the last of these was all that remained standing forty years later. That too has now gone.

Lovell was laid to rest in St. Andrew's Churchyard, North Weald.

March 15, 1940.

A 54 squadron Miles Magister, P6358, undertaking low flying in the vicinity of Upminster on March 15, 1940 hit a tree and crashed.

May 5, 1940.

At 1140 on the Sunday morning of May 5, 1940, a 56 squadron Hawker Hurricane, US*P/N2522 at North Weald became embroiled in a very public, but nonetheless minor, mishap in the Epping Road at North Weald. Pilot Officer M H Constable-Maxwell overshot on a



Twenty-five years ago this crash site was investigated and the last of the trees into which the Hurricane slid still stood—albeit very dead and soon to fall down like its companions. It is assumed that oil from the aircraft poisoned the trees. [PAR]

downwind landing and he and his aircraft ended the flight sitting incongruously nose down in the side of the road. For his error the pilot was court marshalled and admonished upon the basis that he should have retracted the undercarriage rather than end up in a very public position on the highway.

Constable-Maxwell then had 276 hours flight experience, 20 of which were on the Hurricane. He continued into the Battle of Britain, which he survived in spite of being shot down twice.

The aircraft, N2522 also survived for a time. It was repaired at 13MU in May 1940 and then went on to serve the Station Flight at Rolls Royce, Hucknall later in the same month. After serving with 4MU (Rolls Royce) it went onto 5MU in June and on to training duties with 50TU from August 15th. It was finally wrecked in April 1941.

May 17, 1940.

The North Weald airfield 'Decoy' site, 42 Decoy Site, during the 1939-45 war lay four miles to the west at Broadley (or Nazeing) Common.

A section of the site still remains to modern times. It has never proven economical to remove the air raid shelter like control building from the middle of the field [next page] but the building formerly used as living quarters for the care crew [right] finally collapsed in the 1990s after years in use as a farm storage building. The compound in which it stood remained alongside the main road and opposite the southern section of Back Lane, overlooked by the old 'King Harold's Head' public house for some years afterwards but have all now been erased.

The suggestion that the location was meant to represent North Weald is far from apparent. Far from level, a small stream running from east to west also intersects it. From the air in daytime it appeared just as fields, but at night it took on a whole new mantle of cunning.

Whatever the actual success of 42 Decoy site in the war effort - it was bombed a number of times - it was quite convincing enough for at least one RAF crew.

On May 17, 1940, a Friday, Vickers Wellington 1A, serial P9231 of 9 Squadron found itself short of fuel whilst returning from an operational flight dogged by a thunderstorm as well as the enemy. Presented with a fully lit 'airfield' flarepath upon an unidentified airfield displaying a degree of laxity in black out security, the Wellington let down towards the decoy undulating site totally unaware of its purpose.

Guided by the experienced hands of Flt Lt Rivett-Carnac, the Wellington made a near perfect landing between the lights and drew to a halt at the end of the line of flares after



they hit an obstruction at fairly slow speed. In spite of the fact that aircraft and crew had flown into a shallow valley and landed upon agricultural fields, very little damage was caused. The aircrew was picked up after the resident RAF ground crew made arrangements.

The aircraft, P9231, a Vickers built machine delivered late in February, could not be flown out of the confined site. A crew came along to dismantle the machine and send it

off to 9MU for repair. Converted whilst under repair into a freighter, it served with several units before being finally scrapped in January 1947.



May 22, 1940.

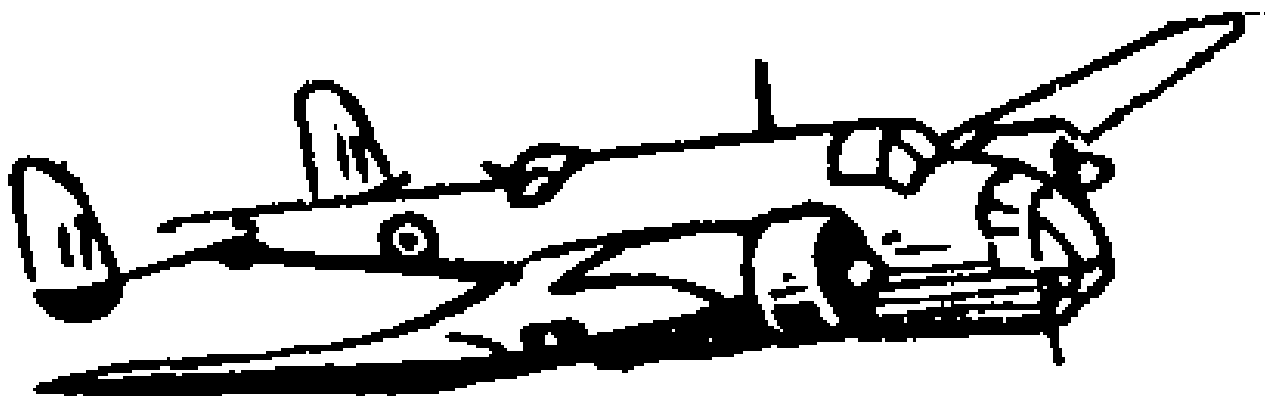
Largely unsung, before, during, and after, the soon to be joined Fighter Command Battle of Britain, the officers and men of Bomber Command took the war to the enemy.

On May 21, 1940 a mixed force of 124 British bomber aircraft were dispatched to attack German railways leading to the battle front at many places between Monchengladbach and Euskirchen. Five aircraft were lost; three Wellington's one Whitley and a Hampden. The latter aircraft crashed near Hornchurch.

The sole Handley Page Hampden lost from this raid effort was a 144 Squadron machine, L4067, from Hemswell, Lincolnshire. The aircraft with its four crew entered German air-space at an altitude of 6,000 feet and facing deteriorating weather conditions. The crew consisted of Pilot Officer E Coton, Pilot Officer Jones, Corporal Smith and Sergeant Cyril Shewry. Hit, and seriously damaged, by defensive German flak the pilot, P/O Coton, ordered the crew to abandon the Hampden as he struggled to hold it steady in what seemed to be a terminal dive. All three cleared the aircraft and safely landed by parachute in Germany except for Sergeant Shewry who was shot on the ground.

At an altitude of 1,000 feet Coton unexpectedly regained control of the Hampden by pushing the throttle through the gate into the emergency position. Aware that the solution was not going to last forever, he pointed in the general direction of England and hoped for the best. It was not long before the engines started to show signs of distress. With Coton alone and erroneously believing himself over The Wash, the defences illuminated the Hampden over the Thames Estuary. Unable to identify himself (the navigator knew the colours of the day code fired by flare, but was being entertained in Germany at the time), Coton was fired upon by the British guns. He abandoned the aircraft by parachute.

Coton, who was to survive the war as a Wing Commander, after flying with distinction in other bombers, was nearly lynched by an angry mob as he made a poor landing in a ploughed field. At 0345 the Hampden crashed at Berwick Road, Rainham.



BATTLE OF BRITAIN 1940

July 24, 1940

The death of Welsh born pilot, Pilot Officer Jack Hamar, DFC whilst flying with 151 Squadron at North Weald is illustrative of the waste brought about by a display of exuberance.

On Wednesday July 24 at the height of the Battle of Britain, P/O Hamar was flying Hurricane P3316, a Hawker built machine of the third production batch, returning from an aborted section patrol. Hamar was flying as 'number 21 to the 151 squadron Commanding Officer, Sqdn Ldr Donaldson. As the aircraft came in for a landing at 1410 hrs., the Hurricane was seen to attempt an upward roll at 500 feet. Unfortunately for the 25-year-old pilot, the machine did not have sufficient speed in hand for such a manoeuvre to succeed and it stalled. It crashed inverted 400 yards south of the airfield killing the pilot and wrecking the valuable aircraft.

The award of the DFC had been announced only the day before the accident.

August 1940.

A report from the Observer Corps post at Nazeing Common resulted in the return of the same recovery crew to the farm very shortly after the removal of the Wellington in order that they could dismantle and take away a second unexpected visitor. A Percival Proctor had landed on high ground near to the farmhouse.



August 7, 1940

At lunchtime on August 7, Pilot Officer C G C Olive was taking off from Hornchurch in Spitfire R6617 when it crashed and caught fire. He was unhurt but the aircraft was destroyed.

August 13, 1940

On Tuesday August 13, 1940, a Supermarine Spitfire, R6830, on its delivery flight in the hands of an Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) pilot suffered engine failure whilst flying to the east of London. The aircraft was put down at Stapleford Tawney, the damage being so extensive that the Spitfire was written off.

August 24, 1940

The first attack on Hornchurch took place on the afternoon of Saturday August 24, 1940. During this attack 264 Squadron Boulton Paul Defiant turret fighters fared badly in the face of the enemy mainly over Thanet and Manston, in all seven of these aircraft were mauled, four being lost or written off.



One of the seven, L6965, was shot down over its home aerodrome in combat with Messerschmitt Bf109s at 1600hrs. Pilot Officer R S Gaskell was slightly injured but his gunner Sergeant W H Machin died of the wounds he received. The aircraft was written off. Some sources claim that this aircraft was shot down over Manston Kent, but there is little doubt that it returned to Hornchurch.

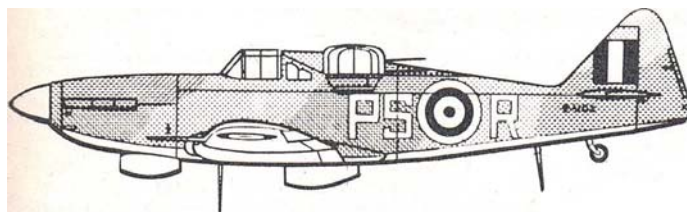
August 24, 1940

During the raid that brought about the destruction of the 264 Squadron Defiant, the en-

emy lost a number of attacking aircraft to the defenders, one came down in West Essex. Heinkel 111H-3 "AI+KT" of KG53 was hit by anti-aircraft fire which disabled its port engine, two Kenley based Hurricane aircraft from 615 Squadron, flown by Squadron leader J Kayll and Pilot Officer S McClintoch, then attacked and shot the bomber down to make a successful controlled crash landing at Clay Tye Hill, North Ockendon, in the vicinity of the modern M25 motorway. Three of the crew, Lt W Luttigen, Uffz O Lackner and Fw A Fraas, got clear by themselves, but returned to free the two wounded members of the crew, Uffz K Platzer and Uffz H Hermans, before the aircraft burned and blew up.

August 25, 1940

Another 265 Squadron Boulton Paul Defiant turret fighter from the same batch of 87 machines as that destroyed by the enemy the previous day, L7003, overshot when landing at Hornchurch and was written off on August 25.



August 26, 1940

During the mid-afternoon of Monday August 26, 1940, a Hawker Hurricane, P3157, of 310 Squadron based at Duxford entered combat with the enemy over the Thames Estuary. The Hurricane fighter was generally considered to be outclassed by the Luftwaffe Bf109 fighter, and it was- during a dog-fight with these that P3157 sustained serious damage which obliged the pilot to break off the engagement.

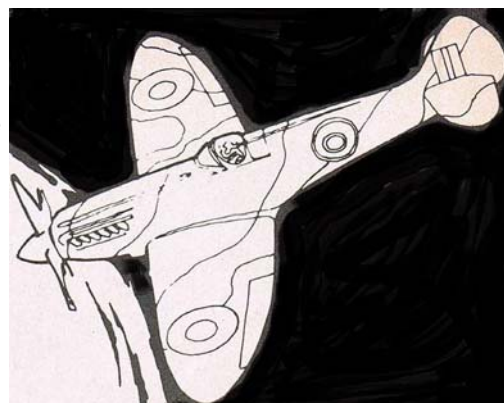
Slightly injured as a result of the combat, the Czech pilot, Sergeant E M C Prchal force landed the stricken Hurricane in a field adjoining Cranham Hall near Upminster at 3.15pm. During that combat 310 Squadron suffered four aircraft damaged, although only two of these were lost and all the pilots survived.

Prchal and the Hurricane survived to fight another day. After repair, the aircraft was employed for a short while on testing at Boscombe Down, suffering an engine failure in January 1941. Its final fate remains unclear. The pilot survived the war, on the way gaining worldwide prominence in being the pilot and sole survivor of the Consolidated Liberator bomber which crashed into the sea, killing General Sikorski and others, shortly after take off from Gibraltar on July 4, 1943.

August 30, 1940

As a result of combat damage sustained in a fight with Luftwaffe 8f109s, at 12.10pm on August 30, a Spitfire R6719 of Hornchurch based 222 Squadron undertook an engine off, wheels up, crash landing at Damyns Hall Farm, Warwick Lane, Upminster.

The damage to the Spitfire was repairable and the pilot, Sergeant 1 Hutchinson, was unwounded. He was to survive being shot down a further three times during the Battle of Britain.



August 30, 1940

On Friday August 30 the Battle of Britain was at its zenith. The defending pilots were at full stretch, daily in combat with a fierce enemy far from their home base.

One of the North Weald units, 151 Squadron, was in fact meeting a large formation of the enemy over the Thames Estuary in the mid-afternoon on that date. In spite of being able to claim a number of victories, two pilots did not return.

One of the losses was Sergeant Feliks Gmer, a Polish pilot serving with the RAF. The series of combats over the Thames took place at about 1600hrs, and shortly after this time a single Hurricane, R4213 of 151 Squadron crashed at a spot called "Jacks Hatch" near Epping Green. The remains of the pilot, Gmer, were laid to rest in Epping Cemetery. The aircraft he had died in was very short lived. Built by the Gloster Co it was delivered to the RAF at 20MU on August 2, 1940 and passed onto 151 Squadron on the 21st. Nine days later it was destroyed.

August 31, 1940

After being shot down by a 603 Squadron, Hornchurch based, Spitfire flown by F/O B Carbury, Messerschmitt Bf109E-1 4806 of IJG26 crashed at Bridge Road, immediately to the west of Rainham at 1245pm. The Luftwaffe aircraft lost a wing in the combat and the pilot, Oberlt L Hafer, successfully baled out but two days later his body was found lying dead in Ingrebourne Creek, his parachute having failed to deploy.

This incident is reported elsewhere as being on August 30.

On the same day, four 54 Squadron were caught Hornchurch at 1315hrs., the aircraft being destroyed.

V-S Spitfire	X4235	V-S Spitfire	R6895
V-S Spitfire	X4236	V-S Spitfire	N3110

taking off at 1800hrs on the same day, two more Spitfire aircraft of 222 Squadron were destroyed by bombs in another attack on the airfield.

V-S Spitfire	P9360
V-S Spitfire	P9505

Later that Saturday a 310 squadron Hurricane, P3159, operating from Duxford was attacking enemy bombers, identified as Dornier 215s, over the Thames Estuary. The Hurricane was attacked and disabled by Messerschmitt Bf109 fighter aircraft at 1.30pm. The Hurricane crashed south of Wennington Church, Romford but the pilot, a Czechoslovakian, Pilot Officer Jaroslav Sterbacek, was posted missing in combat.

In spite of the wreck being excavated in 1978, with some items being recovered Jaroslav's body was never recovered.

At 6.20pm a week old Spitfire, X4271, operating with 603 squadron, and based at Hornchurch suffered serious damage whilst in combat with enemy aircraft over the River Thames.

Parts of the doomed Spitfire crashed earthwards as the pilot, Pilot Officer G K Gilroy, baled out. The Merlin engine of the aircraft crashed into the front garden of number 12 Hereford Road, Wanstead, Essex, the rest of the airframe hitting the front of number 14.

The only direct casualty in the incident was a dog, although residents savagely set upon the unfortunate pilot when he alighted in his parachute. His injuries put him in King George Hospital, Ilford for a while, but he returned to duty to fly before the Battle was over. The street remained cordoned off for a fortnight for clearance of the wreckage. In spite of the extensive damage to the building it was skilfully rebuilt in the same style. This particular Spitfire mark 1 first flew on August 26, 1940 and was delivered to 603 squadron at Hornchurch via a Maintenance Unit the day before being destroyed.

September 3, 1940

Tuesday, September 3 was a busy day in the skies above West Essex. Four aircraft were to crash in the locality in the single day.

The main action in the area related to the presence of a number of twin engine Luftwaffe types, primarily the Messerschmitt Bf110 fighter. The main action took place in mid morning, a Hurricane, R4224, of 17 squadron operating out of Debden force landed near North Weald following an attack by one of the twin engine German fighters at about 10.20am. The pilot, Squadron Leader A G Miller was unhurt and the aircraft was repairable.

Two Messerschmitt Bf110 twin engine fighters collided whilst being engaged by Hurricane fighters protecting North Weald. The two fighter aircraft were from the same unit, the 2nd. Staffel of Zerstoergeschwader 2. One aircraft was Bf110C-4 2133, marked 3M+HL and crewed by Oberlt. K. Muller, the staffel leader and Unteroffizer J. Korn, the other was 2065, marked 3M+EK.



The crew of the second machine was Fw K. Wagenbreth and Uffz. A. Shubarth. Only Muller was to survive the accident, each of the others died either in their aircraft or through bailing out too low for the parachutes to deploy correctly.

At about 1045hrs that day the two machines were operating as part of a bomber escort to a force of about 30 Dornier aircraft attacking North Weald. Some of this force strayed to bomb other locations. Amongst these were the formation that attacked Waltham Abbey and caused severe damage to a factory and petrol station.

The raid very nearly caught 249 Squadron on the ground refuelling at North Weald in a hail of over 200 bombs that wrecked some Hurricane's and a Blenheim of 151 and 25 Squadrons. 249 were unable to gain sufficient height to beat of the attack, but other squadrons managed to get to grips with the enemy.

The Luftwaffe formation was engaged by 310 Squadron from Duxford. It was drastic reaction to this attack that caused the collision and crashes of the two Bf110's.

Muller's machine crashed west of North Weald at Rye Hill near Harlow. Muller parachuted to capture by the patron of the Cross Keys Cafe at Thornwood. He was later passed over to Special Constable Carter and taken to Epping Police Station. Many years later the two met again, by which time Carter was a fully fledged PC who was to serve all his time at Epping.

Korn died in the wreck. Both of the other crew took to their parachutes. Unfortunately both died, hitting the ground at Hubbards Hall, before the equipment deployed sufficiently. Their aircraft fell on Feltimeores, Hobbs Cross, Harlow.

A short while after the collision between the Luftwaffe aircraft, three Hurricane aircraft came upon three aircraft that they identified as German Junkers 88 bombers. They attacked.

As a result of the hail of .303inch machine gun fire directed at the formation all three aircraft were damaged, one mortally. It was only after delivering the attack that it was realised that a mistake had been made in the heat of battle. The recipients of the attack had been friendly aircraft, three Bristol Blenheim's of North Weald based 25 Squadron.

Blenheim L1401 managed to return to North Weald without any injuries but some damage, L8650 also returned to land at Hatfield Heath with heavy damage but again no injuries. It was L1512 that had born the brunt of the attack.

Pilot Officer Douglas William Hogg, RAFVR, aged 23 years, flew the Blenheim and Sergeant E Powell acted as his rear gunner. The combat between friends had occurred over Ongar, and a number of the residents stood outside to watch the battle take place. Mr R

W Wheelhouse at work in the flour mill behind the High Street saw the crippled twin engined machine spin viciously towards the earth out of control. To Wheelhouse the British markings became all too clearly seen. Sergeant Powell managed to escape from the Blenheim over the small town, eventually alighting safely under his parachute at Castle Farm.

Although the aircraft was apparently about to crash within the built up area, it appears that Hogg, in a last supreme effort, managed to wrest some control out of his machine and stop the spin. Although it recovered into a shallow glide it crashed between Ongar and Greensted killing Hogg.

Blenheim 1F L1512 was one of 450 built for the RAF by Bristol in the West Country and had been with 25 Squadron since February 1939.

September 4, 1940

At Stapleford 46 squadron had moved in to replace 151 at the end of August. The battered 151 was sent off to enjoy a period of rest at RAF Digby.

It appears that the previous tenant squadron left one of their Hurricane aircraft behind when they left, possibly it had been unserviceable. Pilot Officer R Ambrose, a pilot who had shot down a Bf109 serving with 46 squadron on September 2, was assigned to take Hurricane V7406 to Digby on Wednesday September 4, then presumably make his way back to Stapleford. The Hurricane crashed into a crane on take off and burned out in the resultant crash. Ambrose died.

September 7, 1940

Another date marked by more than a single combat crash was September 7. Unfortunately, in this instance three of the incidents were to concern friendly aircraft. The day also marked a change in tactics for the Luftwaffe when they sent attacks against London, rather than directly against the RAF airfields.

The wreck of a Hawker Hurricane discovered near to the railway line at Blackacre, between Theydon Bois and Debden stations on the Central Line of the London Underground has never been positively identified.

It is firmly believed that aircraft parts excavated from the site belong to an aircraft from 242 Squadron that went missing on this date. Hawker Hurricane 1, P2962, was built by Gloster Ltd, as one of 500 built in that company's first batch started in 1939 and completed in 1940. Delivered to the RAF in late May 1940 it had only been delivered to 242 Squadron four days earlier. 242 Squadron, based at Coltishall, Suffolk, was being led by the famous legless pilot, Squadron Leader Douglas Bader when it set off on a mission with other units in a Big Wing formation that Saturday afternoon. The pilot of P2962 was Pilot Officer Benzie, a Canadian by birth.

The Big Wing became embroiled in battle over the Thames Estuary with mixed formations of enemy fighter aircraft over South-East Essex. Eleven victories were claimed, but two aircraft failed to return. One pilot was accounted for when he turned up safely later, but Benzie never returned. Subsequently a Canadian Lake was named after him.

The most well know of the local crashes is probably that of Hawker Hurricane R4173 that same September 7 afternoon. Although the pilot was to survive, others on the ground in Roding Road, Loughton, were to die.

The Polish pilot, Pilot Officer Marian Pisarek, was on his first mission with the RAF. In a flight of three machines, Pisarek and his colleagues attacked bombers before being attacked themselves by fighters. After hitting and, it appeared, destroying one fighter, Pisarek's own machine was hit and started issuing smoke and went out of control. In spite of attempts to ensure that his crippled aircraft fell in a safe area - away from the housing

visible below - the aircraft continued straight down after Pisarek was forced to leave it by parachute.

Inverted the Hurricane smashed into the rear garden of 40 Roding Road, Loughton, only a stones throw from the same railway that had been a marker for Benzie's machine. The great force of its plunge buried it into the lawn and under the family air raid shelter. The fuel tanks exploded with a great roar engulfing the occupants of the shelter. Two died instantly, one in the fire.

Pisarek was floating down towards Alderton Hill, Loughton, watched by a number of residents. He landed in a tree and became entangled in its branches. He had managed to free himself just as he was taken 'prisoner' by

a member of the local Home Guard (Charles Cranwell) and an approaching mob of locals. Pisarek's identity card quickly proved him to be friend rather than foe, but his thick foreign accent made it preferable that the safety of the police station be sought.

Marian Pisarek went on the fly 47 missions with 303 Squadron, shooting down four of the enemy. He went missing whilst flying as Wing Commander with 315 Squadron in April 1942. He has no known grave.

Unlike their German counterpart the Bf110 British twin engine fighter aircraft like the Blenheim avoided clearly unequal combat with the enemy in daylight. It was then relatively unusual for such aircraft to be flying on the busy and dangerous afternoon of September 7. At 1643 that afternoon a Hornchurch based 600 Squadron Bristol Blenheim, L6684, crashed at Rainham killing its crew of two, Sergeant A Saunders and Sergeant J W Davies.

The aircraft was approaching the aerodrome from the south when its port engine failed, causing it to crash into East Close, a location only a stones throw away from the crash site of the JG26 Messerschmitt Bf109 a week earlier.

Less than half an hour after the crash of the British aircraft, at 1710hrs, a Messerschmitt Bf110 crashed and disintegrated at Park Corner Farm, Hacton Lane, Upminster, although they evacuated the doomed long range fighter before the impact, both of the crew died.

The aircraft was from ZG2 marked A2+NH with a werke number of 3334 was attacked by a number of the defending British fighters including those from 19 and 310 Squadrons. The 20 year old gunner and radio operator, Hans Mescheder, baled out but his parachute failed to open and he fell to his death in a field at the rear of of Frank's Cottages, St Mary's Lane. The pilot, Kurt Schunemann, 22, also bailed out at the last minute, but it was too low.

September 15, 1940

A British aircraft was reported to have crashed at Nashs Farm, Lodge Lane, Collier Row at 1415hrs on September 15. Standard Battle Of Britain records do not show this crash which suggests that it was a non-combatant type.

September 24, 1940

At 9am on Tuesday, September 24, a two month old 92 Squadron Spitfire X4037, based at Biggin Hill and flown by Canadian Pilot Officer, J S Bryson, was shot down in combat with Messerschmitt Bf 109's.

The aircraft crashed and burned out near North Weald, the pilot died in the wreck. Although this Spitfire lasted far longer than others of its ilk (56 days), it had only spent half of that time with the operational squadron.

September 27, 1940

Shortly before noon on Friday September 27, 1940 a Hornchurch based Spitfire, R6720 of 222 Squadron, was damaged when in combat with Messerschmitt Bf109s and crash

landed in a field to the rear of Noak Cafe in Wennington.

The aircraft suffered quite lightly, being deemed repairable, which was more than could be said for the pilot of the Spitfire, Sergeant R H Gretton, he was suffering from serious back injuries and a cut lip. He was quickly taken to Oldchurch Hospital where he stayed for some months.

October 12, 1940.

At 1640hrs on Saturday October 12, 1940, a Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire, P9512, being flown by Sergeant 3 McAdam, 41 Squadron, suffered engine failure on take off and crashed at Globe Road, Hornchurch. The pilot, already shot down twice during the Battle of Britain, was unhurt but the Spitfire was a write off.

October 18, 1940.

Two Hawker Hurricane aircraft attached to 249 squadron at North Weald suffered minor damage on the evening of Friday October 18.

At 4.30pm Hurricane P3463 flown by a foreign pilot, Adjutant H Bouquillard, ran out of fuel whilst in the landing circuit and force landed at Padfield's Farm, Church Road, Thornwood Common, causing some fairly minor damage to the undercarriage. The Frenchman suffered no injuries.

At 7pm that evening another Hurricane, P5206 of 249 Squadron, was slightly damaged in a forced landing at the disused Maylands Airport site. The exact reason for the crash and the name of the uninjured pilot are unknown.

October 25, 1940

Seven minutes after noon on Friday October 25, a 46 squadron Hurricane, V6804, flown by Pilot Officer William 8 Pattulo crashed into a house in Woodstock Avenue, Romford. The aircraft was on a routine patrol and no reason for the crash was traced.

Although 21 years old Pattulo was pulled alive from the wreck and rushed to Old Church Hospital for treatment he died the next day. He was buried in the war graves section of the North Weald churchyard.

October 29, 1940

By the end of October the Battle of Britain still continued to rage in the skies of eastern England. Although no one yet knew it, the officially marked end was to come shortly.

The squadrons based at North Weald no longer included 56 and 151. Both of these squadrons had been withdrawn to enable them to lick their considerable wounds in a quieter area. In their place came new, fresher, units also equipped with the rugged Hawker Hurricane. 257 and 249 Squadrons.

On Tuesday October 29 at 1640 hours North Weald was attacked by the enemy using a new tactic. Messerschmitt 8f109 single seat fighters of 11(5)LG2 zoomed in at low level, each carrying a single bomb, to attack machines on the ground. Although warned, the Hurricane's of 257 Squadron were caught at the point of take off by the fleeting enemy attack.

A flight of three machines, V6852 flown by Sergeant Alexander G Girdwood, only recently returned to operations after being wounded, P8393 flown by Polish Pilot Officer Franik Surma, and a third machine flown by the ace Robert Stanford-Tuck, were blasted by a bomb as they reached flight speed. Stanford-Tuck's machine survived the explosion virtually unscathed: the other two Hurricane's were not so lucky.

Girdwood's aircraft took the brunt of the blast, crashing instantly into the ground and killing the pilot. Surma's aircraft was severely damaged. Fortunately the Hurricane was coaxed into the air as Surma struggled for sufficient height prior to abandoning it. Taking to his parachute, the pilot found himself floating down over Moreton, to the east of North

Weald. The Hurricane crashed in a rubbish dump to the south of the village.

Franik Surmals past was about to catch up with him. Prior to arrival in the British Isles, he had seen some service with the short lived Polish Air Force. An earlier encounter with the Luftwaffe had left him in possession of a fine leather flying jacket, complete with Nazi insignia. Thus equipped, the RAF pilot was drifting down onto the Essex landscape equipped with only a sparse knowledge of the English language and a very gutteral accent!

It was fortunate that his meeting with terra-firma was forestalled by a line of elm trees adjoining the village pub. His parachute tangled with the vegetation and left him suspended beyond reach of the ground.

At this point two slightly different variations on his subsequent rescue exist. One, the least tasteful, has it that two French sailors climbed up to the helpless pilot and attempted to entangle his Germanic neck in the parachute shrouds before help arrived. The second, acceptable, version of his rescue simply places two Dutch merchant seamen in the role of straight rescuers. When brought to the ground the worried Surma was whisked off to North Weald in a large Hispana Suiza sent to collect him. Both versions of the story admit to his survival - and the swift removal of the offending insignia from the prized jacket!

November 1, 1940

At 2145hrs Heinkel IIIIP-2 1571 GI+JS crashed on a block of flats in Matlock Gardens, Hornchurch. Two of the crew and three civilians on the ground perished.

The pilot Leutnant Hans-Adalbert Tuffers and Uffz Josef Haverstreug managed to vacate the aircraft safely, but Unteroffizier Richard Bubel and Josef Juvan perished when the Heinkel hit the ground spewing fuel everywhere and burst into flames. The burning fuel engulfed a young family sheltering in an Anderson, killing William Bird 29, his wife Margaret 26 and 2 year old Joyce from 12 Matlock Gardens.

November 15, 1940

A combination of fighter attack and anti-aircraft (AA) fire are thought to have been the cause for the demise of a Dornier Do.17Z, werke number 2798 (FI+BT), in the North Weald area.

At 2355hrs on the night of November 15/16. 1940 this Dornier from 9/KG76 crashed with its crew of five into a field some 200 yards west of Latton Priory Farm, Rye Hill, Harlow. The crew, consisting of Lt 8 Wagner, Fw R Grommer, Fw A Hans, Gefr F Heilig and Auffz W Hockendorf all died in the crash.

When, in the 1970s, the site of the crash was investigated by the London Air Museum a number of items were recovered. These included a damaged Iron Cross medal, some bank notes and coins. A further dig in 1984 turned up a number of further items, including the sole of a boot and even later this identification plate.

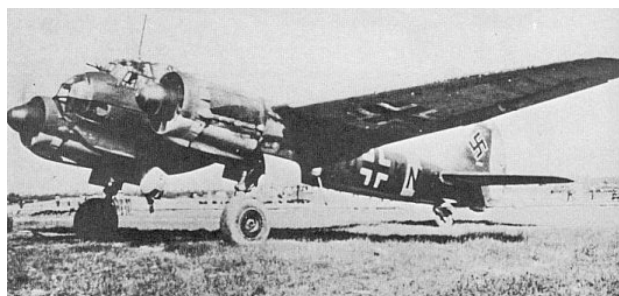


December 9, 1940

Only one German aircraft fell within the southern area of the District early in the war. This was also the only enemy machine known to have crashed in the old Waltham Holy Cross District throughout the war. There were however to be a number of intentionally deposited flying bombs and rockets later in the war years.

Junkers Ju88A-1 twin engine bomber 2206, L1+KP, attached to 6/LG1 stationed at Orleans Bricy in France, fell to the guns of the Chigwell Rise battery on the night of Sunday/Monday December 8/9, 1940.

Whilst passing over the guns at Chigwell Rise, one of the first batteries to be equipped with radar pre-



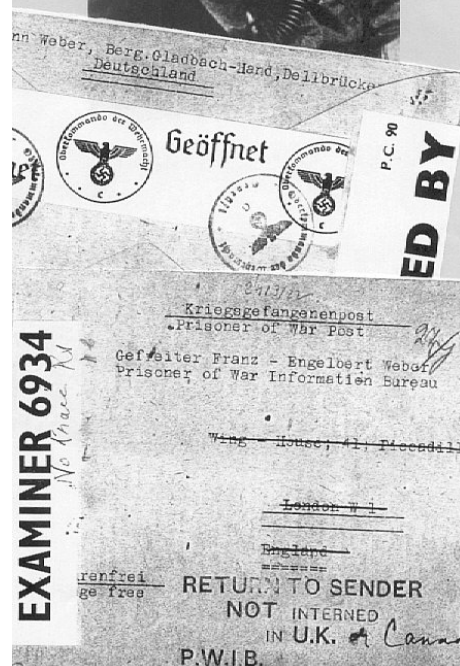
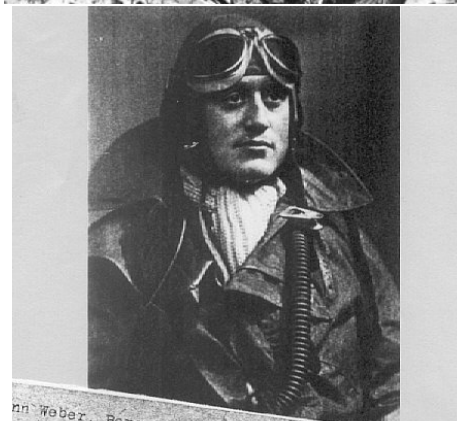
diction, at about 0040hrs the bomber suffered a hit – or hits. Losing height the aircraft headed west towards Loughton in the full glare of searchlights. One of the searchlight units – that stationed in the grounds of the Loughton High School for Girls - was fired upon by the belly gunner of the Junkers.

The crippled Junkers was witnessed to continue its westward flight by many ground based defence groups, each of which could clearly see the aircraft as a moth caught in the intense glare of searchlights, and the fire streaming behind it. The efforts of the pilot, Unteroffizier Max Jappsen, were curtailed when the tail unit of the Junkers detached and all control became impossible. The aircraft plunged earthwards from 5,000 metres towards Epping Forest below with the four crew, including Jappsen, Feldwebel Egidius Leipold and the two air gunners, Gefreiter's Anton Dornauer and Franz Weber, unable to escape in time. The Junkers slammed into the trees and burst into an even greater conflagration.

It took just a few telephone calls to find the site of the crash, in spite of heavy rain a bright yellow glow lit the horizon and reflected from the overcast. The German machine had struck a densely wooded section of Epping Forest immediately to the west of the country lane called Lodge Lane and just 100 yards from the London – Newmarket road [A11] Epping Road.

By the time the first of the rescue parties had arrived upon the scene it was evident that there were to be no survivors. Fire crews, the first being from Loughton, under Chief Fire Officer Ernest Rule, fought the blaze for many hours. A number of others joined them in their task or merely ensured that no unauthorised persons approached the wreck. Two policemen from the Waltham Abbey station, within who's jurisdiction it lay, arrived fully armed with pistol and rifle to undertake guard duty. They soon realised that there was to be little requirement for weapons. Both of the policemen, Sergeant Styles and Constable Newton, soon found that amongst the aircraft parts strewn in the mud and bushes lay ghastly mementoes of the death of the crew. Newton, finding a discarded flying glove, returned it to where he had found it as soon as he discovered that there was a severed hand in it.

The scattered bodies of the four crew remained in the forest until the Wednesday, it being the task of RAF men from North Weald to collect what they could find. A local undertakers, Poulton & Sons of Epping provided a single coffin on December 12. Only enough was found to fill the one coffin, these remains only accounting for a crew of three. The funeral for the crew was held at the Chingford Mount Cemetery on December 14.





The body count confusion led the next of kin of one crew-member to believe that he had survived. It was not until a letter sent to 22 years old Franz Weber in prison camp was returned 'Not interned in UK or Canada' in 1941 that the truth came out.

After the war the Conservators of Epping Forest used the numerous craters left by bombs and the Junkers as rubbish tips. Filled in, the ten-foot deep depression grew over with vegetation and returned to being just another part of the forest.

It was not until investigations by local historians located the site of the 12½ ton Junkers in the 1970s that any further was thought about the crash. On Saturday July 10, 1976 the London Air Museum excavated the site. The first items recovered were as a result of the dumping over the post war years. It was not long before a strong smell of petrol took to the air. Aircraft wreckage was found at a depth of six feet. Although a number of items were found, no major recovery was undertaken.

In January 1979 a message was sent to 590 Explosive Ordnance Disposal at Rochester, Kent claiming the presence of bombs at the site in Lodge Road. A 15 man Territorial Army unit was sent to investigate in the April. On Sunday 22, after two days on site, a bomb fin was found in the excavation. With the presence of bombs confirmed, further investigation confirmed the presence of a 500kg bomb at a depth of 13 feet. The Regular Army Bomb Disposal Duty Officer was called in. The nearby A11 was closed to traffic. Captain Henry removed the fuse from this first bomb under the glare of floodlights, and in pouring rain, at 2300hrs on the Monday. It was his first live extraction. Captain Klewin dealt with a second bomb unearthed on the Thursday. In spite of test bore holes drilled then and again in the September no trace was found of two other bombs the aircraft was thought to be carrying. The site was reinstated.



OFFENSIVE ACTION 1941-1945

With the crash of the Junkers in Epping Forest the number of crashes in the area fell away abruptly, as the enemy generally stayed clear of Essex.

One small incident that did take place was the supposed shooting down of an enemy aircraft into the King George V Reservoir adjoining Waltham Abbey in 1941. As this machine fell into the western side of the expanse of water, the Enfield side, it does not rightly belong in this narrative of right. As it has been ignored by all others, and fable has it that it still lies below the cold waters of the reservoir, it is worth a mention.

According to a published work on the Spitfire [The Spitfire log], and the part played by Douglas Bader's Tangmere Wing in 1941, the squadrons of this fighter formation intercepted a rare enemy daylight foray over London on some date in between April and August that year. One result of this action was that an enemy twin was shot down into the waters of a reservoir near Enfield. That was the only known reference to the fate of this aircraft - either a Messerschmitt Bf110 or a Dornier bomber - until reports began to filter back in modern times about divers finding a German aircraft with the remains of the crew still in it at the bottom of the reservoir. The area of the reservoir was reputedly one that divers were excluded from for no known reason. No-one will answer direct questions but it appears that the wreck has been designated a war grave at some point.

January 2, 1941

A 2 squadron Westland Lysander III, T1531, crashed, and was wrecked, whilst attempting to undertake a forced landing 2 miles SSW of Chigwell on Thursday January 2, 1941. At this period this squadron was based at Sawbridgeworth.

April 7, 1941

The aircraft that crashed at Langford Bridge Farm, Ongar, Essex on Thursday April 7, 1941 was a Hawker Hurricane IIB, Z2663, GN*O of 249 squadron stationed at North Weald.

The pilot of the aircraft was Pilot Officer R E N E 'Dicky' Wynn, then aged 24 years. It was reported that a formation of six Hurricane aircraft were returning together to North Weald from an uneventful convoy escort off Barrow Deep. As they turned in on their final approach Wynn's aircraft rolled over on one wing and dived into the ground killing Wynn instantly.

Because of the unusual circumstances of the crash, extensive tests were undertaken on the wreck, but nothing untoward was found with the aircraft. In spite of the excavations undertaken at the crash site at the time, a further dig on the site in August 1985 brought to light a number of items for the museum collection at Blake Hall.

August 9, 1941

Supermarine Spitfire 11 P8572 first flew in June 1941 and was delivered to 602 (City of Glasgow) squadron at Kenley in mid-July.

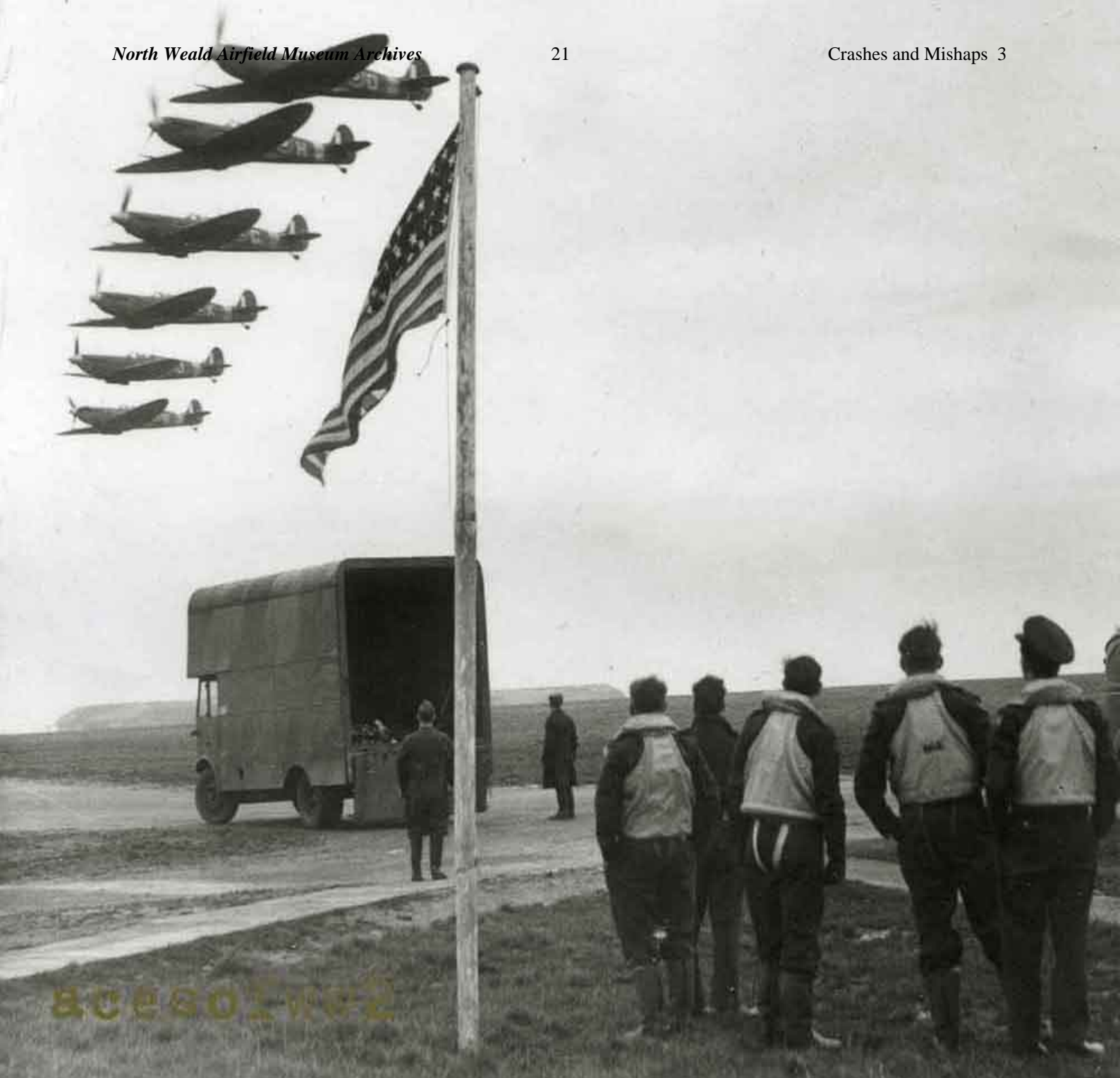
This Spitfire was flying in the vicinity of Ongar on Saturday August 9 when it hit the ground whilst recovering from a dive. It was wrecked.

August 26, 1941.

A Bristol Blenheim IV attached to 11 Group AAC Flight crashed whilst attempting a forced landing at Hornchurch on Tuesday August 26, 1941.

October 15, 1941

Pilot Officer Atkinson, only with the American volunteer manned 71 'Eagle' squadron at North Weald for four days, was killed in a flying accident that developed during aerobatics



over Woodford on October 15, 1941, a Wednesday.

Roger Hall Atkinson, 102048, RAF (VR), aged 20 years, was the son of Lt Col Albert King Atkinson and his wife Florence from Chicago, Illinois, USA. Flying Supermarine Spitfire Vb, AD123, which was seen to break up in the air over Woodford during a steep climbing manoeuvre in aerobatics, the pilot not only suffered being trapped temporarily by his boot beneath the rudder pedal, but a failure to pull the parachute ripcord after baling out.

The main part of the wrecked aircraft crashed about 400 yards ENE of the Rising Sun Hotel on Woodford New Road in Walthamstow. Some parts of the Spitfire were recovered 1½ miles away.

At a subsequent court of inquiry held by the Air Ministry it was found that an order grounding Atkinson, who was considered to be unfit to fly, was received by his commanding officer shortly after he took off due to a lack of urgency being attached to the document. The actual cause of the accident related to aileron instability and structural failure of the starboard wing.

November 15, 1941.

There being no operational sorties during the day, two 71 Squadron Spitfires were among aircraft undertaking local training flights during the weekend on November 15, 1941. Squadron Leader Mears and Pilot Officer Scarborough died in an accident.

April 16, 1942

During early morning operations on Thursday April 16, Pilot Officer Brossmer of 121 squadron nosed over his Spitfire. The, uninjured, pilot was pulled clear of the upturned aircraft by F/O Barbour the medical officer for 222 squadron as dozens of airmen lifted the wreckage from the ground.

June 4, 1942

North Weald Wing were set to providing up to 36 aircraft in support of Circus 186 on the Thursday evening of June 4, 1942. The mission was to escort six Boston aircraft across the English Channel to bomb Dunkirk from 10,000 feet.

In the event 331 squadron despatched eleven aircraft, 222 squadron (normally at Manston) twelve and 121 squadron at Southend sent a further eleven aircraft.

According to the Occurrence Book at North Weald, Sergeant Hoare of 222 crashed his Spitfire on take off, but was uninjured.

A STORY WITH NO KNOWN DATE

Verily, so it was that late one night the RAF Police corporal on duty in the guardroom at North Weald was in the process of brewing up a pot of tea in the guardroom when a dishevelled looking pilot put his head round the door and asked for directions to the officers mess.

This was the first the station became aware that a bomber aircraft had crashed on the airfield. The pilot, far from certain about his aircraft's whereabouts, could only describe it as being tangled up in barbed wire. Eventually it was traced to the fuel dump, a very logical position for it as it had been a shortage of fuel (and a dead engine brought about by enemy action) that had brought about the forced landing in the first instance! The rest of the crew of the Vickers Wellington had baled out as the aircraft crossed the East Coast. [True or false!]

June 29, 1942.

Two Hornchurch based Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire aircraft, a machine gun armed 154 squadron mark IIA P8757, and a cannon armed mark VB, BM413, collided at Hornchurch on Monday June 29, 1942.

July 13, 1942.

The North Weald Wing, in July 1942 consisting of the American's of 121, the British 222 and the Norwegian 331 and 332 squadrons, led by Wing Commander Scott-Malden took off for an anti- shipping raid on Monday July 13, 1942. No targets were found and on the return of the units a Canadian pilot, Sergeant Foster of 222 (Natal) squadron crash landed some two miles east of North Weald airfield. He was unhurt.

November 22, 1942

In proportion to the rest of their aircraft fleet, the use of British aircraft by the United States Army Air Force was miniscule and, in addition, largely confined to the use of non-operational types in a support role.

Among the limited number of operational types to see use were a number of Supermarine Spitfire fighters. It was one such aircraft attached to the HQ of 8 Fighter Command that suffered an engine failure whilst crossing the eastern suburbs of London late in Novem-

ber 1942.

Carrying the pilot, 2/Lt A D Johnson, to his death, the Spitfire crashed into what became The Elms Playing Fields, a location situated north of Coppermill and to the rear of Chester Road, Walthamstow E17.

March 9, 1943

124 squadron, equipped with special high altitude marks of the ubiquitous Spitfire, were officially only posted to North Weald between March 12, when they arrived from Duxford and April 28 when they departed for far off Exeter. In spite of this, this unit managed to involve itself in incidents at the Essex airfield on dates outside this period.

On March 9, Spitfire VII, EN457 suffered engine failure at high altitude and glided down to make an unspectacular wheels up landing on the airfield at North Weald. As the Spitfire was written off on May 21 it must be assumed that the crash caused more damage than might be expected from most wheels up returns to terra-firma.

April 13, 1943.

A de Havilland Tiger Moth attached to 1 Cam Unit, T7723, was wrecked when it crashed on landing at Stapleford on Tuesday April 13, 1943.

The Hawker Typhoon fighter was the manufacturers replacement in service for the famous Hurricane of the Battle of Britain and beyond. Although a strong and powerful aircraft, the early examples of the Typhoon were to suffer structural and engine failures. A New Zealand unit, 486 squadron, introduced the type to North Weald for a month in the summer of 1942, but no noteworthy crashes occurred there in that period.



When the type moved into Fairlop from April 1943 it was a different situation. Between **April 18** and May 28, 1943 there were three home airfield crashes by Hawker Typhoon aircraft stationed at Fairlop.

The first of these involved a Typhoon of 182 squadron which was being flown by F/O Alan Lowey on return to Fairlop from France with flak damage. Once in the circuit of the airfield engine failure brought the aircraft down in a field on the airfield boundary. It was fortunate that Lowey was thrown clear of the aircraft on impact, to survive, as the machine turned turtle and broke up in the crash.

The following two crashes were by aircraft of 247 squadron, the first of these was fatal. F/O A H Burton was flying EJ977 "ZY*H" on **May 18** when it suffered a structural failure 1 hour and 5 minutes into a calibration flight and crashed. The structural failure resulted in the tail detaching. Ten days later Flt Lt C E Brayshaw survived a take off crash in DN430 IIZY*B" on the day the squadron was scheduled to move away from Fairlop to Gravesend.

May 8, 1943

The purpose of a rare daylight raid by a handful of aircraft on the south-east of Britain at breakfast time on Saturday May 8, 1943 is unclear. As a consequence of this raid at breakfast time two aircraft were lost to the defences as they passed over Essex, one fell in West Essex.

Junkers Ju88A-14 (144475) 3E+DR of 7/KG6, with a crew of three, was intercepted and fired upon by two Spitfire aircraft of Blue section of 331 squadron at 0750hrs. Under the hail of fire emitted by the guns of Captain Lundsten and 2/Lt K Bache the Junkers blew up in the air and crashed at Stapleford Hall, Stapleford Abbots.

May 18, 1943

The day after the Bomber Command raid on the dams in Germany, a Tuesday, a 653 Squadron Taylorcraft Auster III, N3986, undertaking low flying during fighter evasion practice hit a tree and crashed at Chigwell Row, Essex.

May 26, 1943

Eight days after the wrecking of the Taylorcraft, and almost one month after the unit had nominally left North Weald for Exeter a section of 124 squadron were undertaking dummy attacks on gun posts in the Chigwell area when Spitfire Mark VI, AB211 flown by Flight Sergeant Haynes hit a building. The pilot lost control and dived into the ground. The aircraft was destroyed and the pilot killed.

This Spitfire had survived a year before the accident. It was first issued to 124 squadron in February 1942, spent a period with 616 squadron, and returned to serve with 124 yet again when the other squadron changed to the Mark VII.

In the summer of 1943, the 387th Bombardment Group was a medium bomber formation attached to the US 8th Air Force and stationed at Chipping Ongar from June 25 to October 16, 1943. This group, comprising four squadrons [556th 557th 558th and 559th], was equipped with mixture of Martin B26B and B26C Marauder twin engine aircraft throughout its stay in Essex. Although there were no specific faults that could be attributed to the type, the Marauder was not considered to be one of the better aircraft operated by the Allies. There were numerous occasions when losses appeared higher than might be expected in the hands of any but the more experienced flyers. In spite of gaining its "Widow Maker" nickname early in its war career, in retrospect the type was found to have one of the lowest attrition rates of all US aircraft employed in the war years.

A lengthy working up period ensured that this group did not undertake its first war operation until August 15, 1943. After 29 missions with the 8th, in October, it joined the US 9th Air Force and left Chipping Ongar for Stoney Cross in July 1944, a move made just in time for operations in France after D-Day from August 1944.

September 9, 1943

In conditions of early morning mist 55 of the US 387th Bomber Group's B26 Marauder aircraft, flown by relatively inexperienced pilots unused to IFR flying, took off for a mission in visibility said to be just 100 yards. One of the Marauder aircraft crashed off the end of the Chipping Ongar runway on September 9, 1943, only the tail gunner of this unidentified aircraft survived the crash.

**October 1, 1943**

On this Friday, a USAAC Martin B26 Marauder on a training flight crashed a short distance to the south of the Officers Mess at North Weald killing all of the crew. Undoubtedly either from one of the Chipping Ongar or Matching squadrons, the source of this aircraft is uncertain.

October 25, 1943

Two 332 (Norwegian) Squadron Supermarine Spitfire IX's taking off from North Weald collided on this Monday. They were MH942 flown by Flight Sergeant R Hoiland and MA709 in the charge of Sergeant O Christiansen.

The two aircraft were in a wing take off prior to operations. The formation leader moved forward on the ground to make room for aircraft behind and then stopped. Unfortunately this was misinterpreted by aircraft behind, some of which moved forward assuming a take off. One Spitfire over-ran the other.

The Spitfire MA709 had previously served a short period with 129 squadron and joined the Norwegian unit in August 1943. It survived the war, only to be involved in a fatal crash in April 1948.

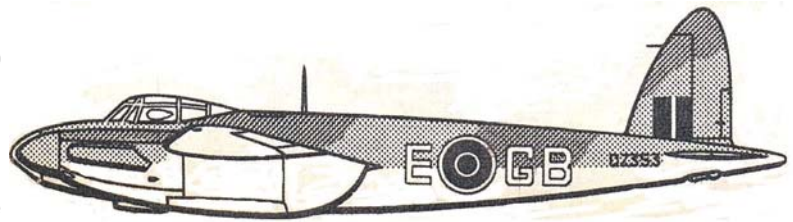
The other aircraft, MH942, only a fortnight old, was wrecked in the North Weald incident.

November 26. 1943

The Royal Observer Corps post on Nazeing Common logged the night-time crash of an aircraft identified as a de Havilland Mosquito night fighter. It was stated that the loss occurred after a collision with an unstated type. Unfortunately the original document gave the erroneous date of October- 26, 1943.

Contemporary records in the squadron record for 410 (Canadian) squadron, then based at Hunsdon, Hertfordshire, provided the true answer and date to this incident. It was in fact Friday November 26, 1943.

Two de Havilland Mosquito II (Special) night fighter aircraft attached to 410 squadron were scrambled on fighter interception patrol. Mosquito DD669, crewed by Pilot Officer Blanchfield and Flying Officer Cox took off at 2045hrs., followed five minutes later by Warrant Officers James and Levine in DZ259.



After the completion of uneventful patrols, the two aircraft undertook exercises with the Easthill GCI (Ground Control Interception) operator close to Hunsdon. With the aircraft flown by James and Levine acting as the 'enemy' Blanchfield and Cox were directed by the GCI close to their quarry. At about 2147hrs both aircraft were at 12,000 and Cox, using the aircraft's short-range radar, was directing Blanchfield in for the 'kill' on their quarry. Shortly after this both aircraft reported that they had collided with each other. James and Levine succeeded in abandoning DZ259 and parachuted to safe landings at Stockton Pelling, near Buntingford. The pair in DD669 was less fortunate.

Parts of the aircraft fell on and around a family home to the north of the Nazeing Common known as "Thatched Cottage" Broadley Common. The building is set back to the west of the roadway between the "Sun Inn" and "Black Swan" public houses.

The major sections of aircraft wreckage fell to the front of "Thatched Cottage". The tail had broken free and fell on the thatched roof. The main fuselage – the two engines and the crew – smashed into the pond at the front of the house close to the party fence with Broadley Common House. The resultant fireball set the thatch on the cottage well alight.

The location was incorrectly reported back as being Broadley Common House. On the ground the Civil Defence [CD] first heard about an air crash at Broadley Common at 2212hrs. The situation report reaching the CD Control Room was little less clear at 2255hrs over an hour after the collision and crash. In the continued confusion it was not until 2314hrs, that a message giving the correct information on the aircraft and location was recorded. The occupying Green family had all escaped from the house.

By 0130hrs in the morning the fire was reported as under control and the bodies of the crew located. The widespread damage to the house and the roadway that passed in front of it, including a number of badly smashed trees, was such that the area was sealed off for a few days after the crash.

The RAF sent a clearance party to the crash site to assess possible mechanical clues to the cause, remove all visible wreckage and the remains of the crew. The Mosquito was a wooden aircraft so there was little to be found. At the subsequent crash enquiry no blame was attached to the pilots. Although it was not fully understood how the "attacking" air-

craft, flown by the crew who died at Nazeing, had failed to see the lights of his friendly target, it was decided that the cause was wholly due to the high overtaking speed of their aircraft. In peacetime an enquiry may have come to a different, less hasty, conclusion.

At the cottage the majority of the thatched roof and the aircraft were consumed by the fire. The major metal parts of the latter, primarily the two Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, were recovered from the pond, although parts of one were allegedly left deeply buried below it. Over the years a number of metal aircraft parts have been found but none match the gruesome contemporary reports that for a period the unfortunate occupants of the cottage were regularly presented with chunks of what appeared to be human flesh by their gun dog.

Although their home was severely damaged the Green family was able to stay on and rebuild 'Thatched Cottage'. With great ingenuity they overcame severe wartime shortages but they could not replace the roof in its former style. Sufficient tiles were found to replace the former thatch of the roof and make it habitable once again.



The cottage remained with the same family until their deaths in the 1990s. Mrs Green died about 1993 and the cottage changed hands. A second new owner Mr Charles Bradbrook acquired 'Thatched Cottage' late in 1999 and set about a major refurbishment of the structure that saw the builders virtually in constant residence. Between February and April 2001, more than 57 years after the event, the refurbishment put right the ravages of history by restoring the roof to something near its former glory. The new thatch was a little deeper than the original and it was necessary to make the



central chimney stack taller to compensate. During the works on the house and gardens the pond was stripped out to its clay bed and when the silt was later scanned with a metal detector a number of bullets - .303 and 20mm, a mixture of live and spent - was discovered.

February 13, 1944

A Luftwaffe Junkers Ju88S-1 attached to 1/KG66 based at Montdidier, France, was intercepted and shot down by a Mosquito at Havering - atte - Bower, Romford, Essex on the evening of February 13. The Junkers, werke number 140606, bore the marks "Z6+HH". Intercepted by a 406 squadron Mosquito, flown by S/L J.D. Somerville and F/O. G.D. Robinson ' the aircraft as fired upon and damaged. The aircraft was further engaged by 3.7inch AA guns and it was these that caused the major damage that caused the Junkers to crash at 2110hrs. The Luftwaffe crew suffered mixed fortunes, Uffz. H. Ehling and Fw J Weikert ere both killed, wheras Uffz. Helmut Neidack, though injured, survived to be taken prisoner.

The wreck of the Junkers was excavated in 1985 and 1986. During the latter dig Neidack was present.

March 14. 1944

The Luftwaffe raiders on this night suffered an early loss to a defending Bristol Beaufighter VI night-fighter flown by Wing Commander D Hayley-Bell DFC. Aply aided by the directions of the GCI and his own radar operator F/O H W Uezzett, Hayley-Bell shot down a Junkers Ju88A-14 (550509) over East London at 2315hrs.

The crippled Junkers crashed to earth into an empty building situated in the Woodford Avenue, Gants Hill, Ilford. Of the four man crew, Lt. P Kohn and Uffz. G Donzyk died in the wreck. Two others, Uffz C Prodehl and Uffz H-R Eger managed to leave the aircraft by parachute. Prodehl was mortally injured, but Eger was taken prisoner.

March 25/26 1944

On this night 15 attacking aircraft were destroyed from a force of 143 sent against the British Isles. Two of this number fell in West Essex.

A Junkers Ju88A-14 attached to 4/KG6 with a werke number 550559, marked 3E+AM was shot down by 3.7inch guns of the 26 AA Brigade and crashed from 15,000 feet at Fairview House Farm, Chigwell at 0100hrs.

Of the four crew, Lt. H Besser was killed and the three others baled out. The surviving members of the crew were Unterofficers J Titz and H Mette. Obergefreiter H Wissel was injured.

The farm location, on the very edge of the modern Hainault Estate is off the B173 Lambourne Road and right alongside the local authority borders for Epping Forest and Redbridge.

The second local Luftwaffe casualty that night was also a victim of HAA fire – this time from the gunsites E3 and Z76.

At 0300hrs on the morning of Saturday March 25 Junkers Ju88A-4 3E+HT attached to 9KG6 caught fire in the air and dived into the ground at 199 Redbridge Lane, Ilford destroying the semi-detached house. In addition to the four man crew the impact killed a woman, Mrs. Irene Murray and two children aged eight and six.

March 1944

In March 1944 a Spitfire LFIX, MH854, attached to 332 squadron (squadron codes being AH*?) stationed at North Weald suffered engine failure shortly after take off, causing the aircraft to undertake a forced landing at Stanford Rivers.

April 1. 1944

An American Consolidated B24 Liberator four engined bomber attached to 409 Squadron, 93 Group, USAAF, landed at North Weald on the afternoon of April 1, 1944 during its return from a raid on Ludwigshaven.

Unable to return to its normal, Hardwick, base due to a shortage of fuel

and damage, the aircraft was flown into the airfield by 1st Lt. Atkinson. The damage was confined to the rear tail unit and associated controls, no members of the crew had been injured in the incident.



April 12, 1944

An apparently minor collision in the air resulted in two of 331 squadron's Spitfire LFIX'S, coded FN*?, making forced landings at Berry Farm, Ongar on April 12, 1944.

Although both aircraft were shown as "crashing" at the location, both continued in service for some time - presumably after necessary repairs were undertaken. MH938 was the longest lasting of the pair of aircraft, not being struck off RAF charge until January 1, 1945. The other aircraft, MH724, had previously been struck off charge on October 31, 1944.

April 19, 1944

At 0118hrs on the morning of April 19, a Junkers Ju188E-1 of 5/KG2, werke number 260391, marked US+BN, was hit by 3.7inch AA guns stationed at Chadwell Heath, Wanstead and Enfield whilst flying at about 18,000 feet.

Unusually, all five of the crew managed to vacate the aircraft before it crashed. Only three of the crew managed to reach the ground and be taken prisoner, the other two died; one through the failure of his parachute to open, and the other died from injuries received prior to vacating the Junkers. The aircraft crashed into 14 Seven Kings Road, Ilford, killing the four occupants sheltering in the basement.

May 28, 1944

With D-Day impending there was a flush of incidents involving aircraft of the United States. At 1215hrs on Monday May 28, NA P51 Mustang pilot, Lt Grove of 336 Fighter Squadron, 4th Fighter Group, USAAC, based at Debden near Saffron Walden, took off on a mission and found that he was unable to raise either the undercarriage or the flaps on his aircraft.

Upon reaching North Weald, the pilot attempted to land his aircraft, but overshot and the Mustang cartwheeled off the higher ground at the end of the runway, clearing the Epping to Ongar road at the south end of the airfield and ended up wrecked on the station sports field (now a small golf course). Lt Grove was lucky and only received minor facial injuries from the experience.

Prior to incorporation in the 8th Air Force during September 1942, the 336th had previously been 133 Eagle Squadron RAF.

June 1944

On an unspecified date in June 1944, 42-30827 "Round Trip Ticket 111", a 549th Bomber Squadron, 385th Bombardment Group, Boeing B17F carried out a safe force landing at North Weald following the crew's inability to feather the propeller on number 4 engine. True to its name, this particular aircraft continued to bring its crews home until it was finally retired as "war weary" in August 1944 after completing 57 missions. Stripped of its war equipment this B17 became a transport aircraft during the following winter.

The 385th was then stationed at Station 155, situated south of Great Ashfield, Suffolk and ten miles east of Bury St. Edmunds. With Mendlesham this airfield was a satellite to Crowfield.



June 3, 1944

The following Saturday, another American aviator arrived at North Weald under slightly unusual circumstances. Sergeant A C Thomas attached to the 845th squadron, 489th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force arrived at the guardroom in the company of a civilian, having been picked up near Ongar.

After the alarm was raised staff at North Weald were able to trace a further eight fellow members of Sergeant Thomas Liberator crew. One was missing and presumed to have died in the aircraft.

The 845th was flying a mixture of B-24H and B-24J bombers out of Halesworth, Suffolk at this period.

June 7, 1944

The day after D-Day two USAAC NA Mustang fighter aircraft collided in cloud near Blake Hall, the site of the North Weald operations room. At 1456hrs on Wednesday June 7, the alarm was raised by staff at Blake Hall. One pilot was found safe but the other died.

June 13, 1944

On June 13 1944 a USAAF North American P51 Mustang crashed close to Wintry Park Farm, alongside the main A11 road in Thornwood Common, Epping.

The machine was an unidentified aircraft attached to the 339 Fighter Group based at Fowlmere and outward bound on a raid. The codes worn by this FG would have been 5Q*? but both the individual letter and the aircraft serial are unknown.

The pilot on this occasion was one Lt. William R.(or B) OPITZ who baled out and suffered burns. The fact that he landed quite close to his machine resulted in the farmer being given the airman's gloves. Opitz was taken to St.Margarets Hospital, Epping but did not remain there long before being collected by the US Military. The farmer upon who's land the machine crashed has refused has so far refused any investigative digs of the remains in the clear crater that remains to this day.

July 8, 1944

A Martin B26 Marauder of the USAAF stationed at Matching suffered an engine failure on take-off from its home airfield and made a diversion and forced landing on the grass NE-SW runway at North Weald.

Having unloaded its 2,000 lb bomb load the Marauder returned to Matching under its own power that same afternoon. The runway at North Weald was increasingly showing itself to be too short and under strength to accommodate loaded examples of this and other large types.

July 12, 1944

A Hawker Typhoon, EK326, flown by W/O R B Hoare crashed on the west end of the main runway at North Weald. Although listed locally as being due to engine failure, full investigation found that the aircraft had swung violently at the end of the runway, causing the pilot to prematurely retract the undercarriage to both stop the aircraft and ensure that it missed ground obstructions in the dispersal area.

A trim tab had been subject to poor maintenance and, although the type was not permanently based at the airfield at the time, the 'erks' at North Weald were censured over the crash.

August 9, 1944

At 2330hrs two Airspeed Oxford aircraft taxiing along the perimeter track at North Weald collided when one stopped unexpectedly in the darkness and was hit from behind by the other.

Although fighter squadrons came and went regularly, for a lengthy period North Weald was also the base of a number of 'non-operational' squadrons flying a variety of types such as the Lysander, Tiger Moth, Oxford and even the obsolescent Hurricane in a new second-line role. These were mainly employed on anti-aircraft gun co-operation and radar calibration duties but there were other uses that were less obvious but clearly dangerous front-line operations.

As the Allied armies thrust across France, these North Weald based Oxford aircraft were increasingly called upon to fly unarmed missions in support of the bomber effort – early electronic warfare.

August 28, 1944

In spite of these secretive missions by nominally 'second-line' aircraft, the major sector effort at North Weald centred on fighters.

Eight Spitfire aircraft of 310 (Czech) Squadron, on their first mission from the airfield, accompanied by a further twelve Spitfires from 312 (Czech) Squadron set off for Ramrod 1242 in the St Omer – Arras area of northern France. The attack went ahead without major trauma.

On return from this mission F/Sgt. Komvicka of 312 crashed his Spitfire MK691 and was slightly injured.

September 23, 1944

The squadrons stationed at North Weald were fully occupied in support of the airborne landings at Arnhem, Holland (operation 'Market-Garden') when an Avro Lancaster B III bomber, PB512, attached to 582 squadron was employed in fighter affiliation exercises near North Weald. The Lancaster inexplicably went into a dive at a height of 8,000 feet and never came out of it before it dived into the ground some four miles to the east of the village.

The crew were all killed in the incident, the dead being listed in the North Weald diary as: - F/Os Shirley [a New Zealander], Hill and Burch, F/Sgts D G T Smith and Mitchell [an Australian], Sgt Evans and LAC Alston. Their remains were transported to the station mortuary.

The following day Wing Commander Deacon DSO, travelled to the station to investigate the incident. Although it was suggested by eyewitnesses that a part of the tail had been seen to break off prior to that final dive, he was unable to find any evidence of mechanical failure - such as elevator failure - and the matter was put down to pilot error. Lancaster PB512 was one of hundreds of Lancaster's built by A V Roe in Manchester in 1944. The squadron was formed and stationed at Little Staughton as part of No.8 Group in April 1944, being mainly employed on target marking duties.

Sixty years later the North Weald Airfield Museum was handed an corroded aircraft part that appeared to be a 'missing' part of a Lancaster elevator.



October 5, 1944

A Spitfire of 313 (Czech) Squadron, noted only as DU*V in the North Weald log, crashed at the end of runway 03 on October 5, 1944.

The oddest part of this report is that 313 squadron were allotted the marks RY, and not DU, which suggests that this aircraft was actually one previously allotted to 312 squadron and left behind when the two squadrons changed over the previous day, giving insufficient time to yet receive its 313 code marking. 312 had moved to Bradwell Bay.

October 10, 1944

Avro Anson X, NK695, attached to a Special Flight at Broadwell was landing at Hornchurch on the night of October 10, 1944.

Unfortunately for the crew, due to haze the pilot misjudged his landing spot and hit a slit trench. This ripped off the undercarriage and sent the Anson careering off in an unintended direction. It ended up colliding with a hangar.

October 27, 1944

A 288 squadron Spitfire, nominally based at Collyweston but actually assigned to an anti-aircraft co-operation unit with various aircraft spread across the country, came into land at its North Weald base on October 27, 1944. The Spitfire left the hard surface of the runway and, after sinking into the boggy ground under the wet grass, tipped up on its nose. There were no injuries.

In the period it was at North Weald, between January and November 1944, 288 squadron operated a mixture of Spitfire, Oxford, Hurricane and Beaufighter aircraft on AAC duties.

**October 28, 1944**

During the next day a Czech operated Spitfire of 313 squadron crashed on landing after returning from undertaking an escort of Halifax and Lancaster bombers along part of their route in an attack on Cologne.

November 15, 1944

A Vickers Warwick BV258, supposed of 278 [Spitfire] Squadron out of Martlesham Heath, crashed half a mile east of Blake Hall railway station and burst into flames. Although 278 were quoted in the North Weald log it is quite likely that the aircraft belonged to 279 Squadron based at Thornaby.

Fortunately, the crew of five, although burned, were rescued and taken to North Weald prior to being sent to St Margarets Hospital, Epping, for further treatment.

November 21, 1944

Flying Officer Bell attached to 63 squadron failed to get his Mustang 1 airborne from North Weald on November 21, 1944. The Mustang crashed across onto the Epping and Ongar road causing the pilot slight injury and resulting in the road being blocked for an hour and a half.

Records show that 63 squadron gave up their Mustang aircraft for Spitfires in May 1944. It just shows that records are often incomplete.

December 11, 1944

Two aircraft scheduled to take part in Ramrod 1402 crashed on take off from their North Weald base on December 11, 1944.

A 234 squadron Mustang III and a Spitfire of 310 squadron failed to make the trip. 234 squadron had converted to the long range Mustang for escort duties immediately after D-Day and both squadrons were only stationed at North Weald between late August and December 1944.

December 23, 1944

Another Spitfire of 310 (Czech) Squadron at North Weald, coded NN*Y, was recorded as having collided with a bank on the airfield – just six days before the unit moved out to Bradwell Bay.

December 24, 1944

That Christmas was further ruined for the men at North Weald by a further incident on December 24. A Spitfire IX, M?681 flown by Flying Officer R E Dodds attached to 313 squadron was reported to have been involved in a collision at North Weald at 1600hrs. The other aircraft involved was another Spitfire, ML259, flown by F/Lt J A H Pinney. The subsequent enquiry ruled that it was a degree of inattention on the part of Pinney that brought about the incident.

313 squadron was stationed at North Weald with Mk IX Spitfire's from October that year until December 29, when they moved on to Bradwell Bay at the same time as the other Czech squadron, 310.

January 4, 1945

The plotters of the Air Raid Precautions Department at Waltham Abbey (working in their Control Room situated in Crooked Mile) recorded the landing of a "trainer" aircraft in a field alongside the Crooked Mile – the road to Nazeing and Harlow. This was not a major incident and efforts to trace its identity have failed.

February 1, 1945

A Spitfire VB, W3249, flown by Flying Officer P Holden of 287 (AAC) squadron crashed at North Weald on this date. This anti-aircraft co- operation unit had been based at North Weald during the summer of 1944, but at this time although a number of aircraft remained to be flown from the Essex airfield its base was Gatwick. The cause of this incident was found to be the pilot's inadvertent early retraction of the undercarriage.

February 3, 1945

A Hawker Tempest V fighter, JN759, of 287 squadron, by then again having had its headquarters formation moved and stationed at Redhill rather than Gatwick, suffered a tyre burst as it took off and crashed at North Weald at 1245hrs during training circuits and landings. The pilot, Flight Sergeant 1559971 A Lewis, survived with only slight injury.

February 20, 1945

Flt Lt Gordon of 26 (South African) squadron was congratulated in the North Weald log for having made an excellent crash landing of a Mustang 1 on February 20, 1945. This squadron was based at North Weald in the early months of 1945.

The engine of the Mustang failed as the aircraft set off down the runway on take-off as the wheels retracted. Although unable to fully re- lower the wheels in time, he was able to set the aircraft down back on the ground and bring it to a halt within the length of the runway.

Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, an event which led to a massive reduction in the required flying activity in the UK, notwithstanding the continued war in the Far East. With this new situation came limited demobilisation of staff and a welcome reduction in accidents.

