

The Messerschmitt that crashed twice

and they struggled onwards in a south eastern direction. The crew knew that they would not make it back to France and were also aware that they would have to make an emergency landing sometime soon. Landing on one engine could be very hazardous, let alone the possibility of having to come down on uneven farmland.

At about 04.25 hours an unidentified aeroplane was seen in close proximity to a Hurricane and Blenheim that were circling Steeple Morden airfield. It was a bright moonlit night, but no positive identification could be made of this unannounced visitor. A signal lamp was used to challenge the aircraft, whereupon it almost immediately fired a red/yellow coloured flare and proceeded to make a landing.

Just after it came down the starboard undercarriage collapsed, slewing the aircraft round slightly and damaging the starboard radiator, wing tip, propeller and tail plane. RAF personnel ran over to assist and then made the incredible discovery that it was German Junkers 88 and proceeded to gather and disarm the crew. Some publications incorrectly state that the crew tried to take off and that they landed by accident due to being disorientated.

It is also mentioned that the Junkers 88 was fired upon by an Armadillo armoured car, and was thus damaged, preventing take off, this is also incorrect. Although there may well have been just such an armoured car on the airfield it was not used in action. The aircraft was intact, was a real prize, and of great interest. Later it was dismantled and taken to RAE Farnborough where it was allocated the number HX360 and was used as spares by No. 1426 (Enemy Aircraft) Flight.

67 Years On

Steeple Morden has largely reverted to agriculture, but the village is very proud of its association with the airfield and all that occurred there. There are numerous reminders including a superb road-side memorial. The point where this German aircraft crash landed is in a field now mainly used for barley, wheat or pea production, all traces of this aircraft have vanished, sadly like the majority of the airfield it came down on.



19 JULY 1941

Messerschmitt Bf 109F-2
ES906
Air Fighting Development Unit
Location:
Fowlmere

Pilot:
Flying Officer M. J. Skalski - killed

Crashed after pilot lost consciousness

Captured airworthy German aircraft were very useful to the RAF for combat evaluation purposes, these are seen later in the war at Collyweston

On July 10th 1941 Hauptmann Rolf Pingel the Gruppenkommandeur of Stab 1/JG26 was following a group of Stirling bombers over the Channel in his Messerschmitt Bf 109F-2. He was later to say, "I followed one of those big planes on its way back to England hoping for a chance to attack." The opportunity arose and Pingel lined up on his target, but almost immediately his aircraft experienced engine failure. It is unknown whether any of the Stirling's gunners were responsible for damaging Pingel's aircraft. With the engine seriously over heating and finally seizing he managed to glide towards Dover, making a good forced landing in a field of oats near St Margaret's Bay. To the delight of his captors Rolf Pingel had presented the RAF with a near

Intruders over Cambridgeshire 1941

undamaged example of the Messerschmitt variant. The downed aircraft was removed from the field and taken to Farnborough for a full evaluation. It was tested and repainted, being given the RAF serial ES906. At this stage it was handed over to the Air Fighting Development Unit. The AFDU was established at Duxford to assess the relative performances of Allied aircraft and their captured Luftwaffe counterparts.

Just nine days after crash landing at St Margaret's Bay, the sound of an enemy aircraft could be heard in the skies over Duxford; it was Pingel's aircraft undergoing a comparison performance test flight with a Spitfire. Flying the captured Me 109 was Polish Flying Officer M. J. Skalski.

At one stage of the test the Messerschmitt turned over and went into a 45 degree dive, it steepened its dive until it was vertical and did not pull out. With the engine screaming under full power it hit soft ground adjacent to a small pond at Fowlmere. The official Air Ministry Form 1180 records that Skalski was most likely the victim of carbon monoxide fumes and had been rendered unconscious causing him to crash.

The plane crumpled up on impact and buried itself. Here the wreckage remained for thirty-eight years until excavated by Steve Vizard and Andy Saunders in 1979. Much compressed wreckage including the tail section still bearing Pingel's original victory markings and larger components such as the Daimler Benz DB601N engine were recovered. These artefacts can now be seen at the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum.



Above;
Hauptmann Rolf
Pingel

Left;
Shortly after salvage
the remarkable
condition of Pingel's
Me 109 can clearly
be seen, the only
obvious damage
being the rather bent
propeller blades



Above,
Two genuine fired
Luftwaffe 20mm shell
cases found recently
near Bassingbourn

1941 also saw the arrival of other Luftwaffe aircraft in the skies of Cambridgeshire; these were the specialist night fighter units, or Nachtjägergeschwadern. The main unit that operated here was NJG2 flying Junkers Ju88C-2s and C-4s from bases in Holland such as Gilze Rijen. These aircraft were solid nosed Junkers Ju88 variants that were armed with up to three 20mm cannons and three MG17 machine guns firing forward and a single MG 15 in the rear dorsal position. Their main area of operation seemed to be around the southern Cambridgeshire district where they had some success in shooting down Wellington bombers in the Bassingbourn area.

9th April 1941 a solitary night fighter made an attack upon Bourn airfield. It opened fire on some buildings and released several SC50 bombs that exploded on the runway. Little damage was caused and there were fortunately no injuries. On the same night Wellington L4253 was shot down and crashed at Ashwell in Hertfordshire, possibly by the same aircraft that attacked nearby Bourn.

24th April 1941 Wellington N2912 of 110TU based at Bassingbourn was shot down during its landing approach by a Junkers 88C night fighter piloted by Feldwebel Gieszubel. Completely out of control, the stricken bomber crashed onto the airfield where, amidst acres of open space, it crashed directly onto another of the unit's aircraft R1404 parked at dispersal. The eighteen year old pilot, Sgt Alstrom, and thirty year old Sgt Wilson were both killed although the third crew member, Sgt Nicholls, walked from the wreckage with only minor injuries.

2nd May 1941 six HE bombs and ten explosive incendiaries fell on Waterbeach airfield at 23.05 hours. The aircraft that dropped these may well have been the one involved in a later action when a few minutes later Stirling N6012 was attacked just as it had lowered its undercarriage coming into Oakington. It caught fire and smashed into trees at Dry Drayton.

Wellington LG-G
is N2912, shot
down on 24th
April 1941 over
Bassingbourn



5th May 1941 Sergeant Parrott was flying his No. 257 Squadron Hurricane and beginning landing procedures over Duxford. As he descended, Feldwebel Hans Hahn followed him down and delivered a short burst of cannon fire causing the RAF fighter to crash near Royston, killing its pilot.

6/7th May 1941 enemy intruders once again targeted Oakington releasing a total of five HE bombs onto the airfield.

15th June 1941 a Ju88C of NJG2 flew at low level over Oakington, its guns firing, and dropping a single bomb, this damaged offices and a parked Stirling and killed an airman.

16th June 1941 saw a Tiger Moth training aircraft having its entire tail section shot away over Caxton Gibbet. Unusually the German crew responsible never submitted a claim for this incident.

22nd - 23rd July 1941 Seven anti-personnel SD2 'Butterfly' bombs fell in a field to the west of Oakington. Others had fallen over the airfield causing slight damage to a Stirling. An airman in a tent was seriously injured by one that exploded and he died sometime later.

18th July 1941 Wellington X3169 was fired upon by an intruder just as it was about to land at Steeple Morden and was seriously damaged. It is possible that this attack was made by Heinz Volker and his crew in their night fighter, as it is known he was operating in this area. Victories were reported by both Leutnant Heinz Volker and Oberleutnant Schulz (both Wellingtons, and both just over the county boundary).

**Looking every
bit the hunter,
this Ju88C of
NJG2 awaits
the darkness at
Gilze-Rijen**



**The hunted, a Stirling
on final approach,
vulnerable with its
crew relaxing after
several hours of
vigilance over enemy
territory**

12th August 1941 saw the German intruders back in Cambridgeshire. One of them, Oberfeldwebel Rolf Bussmann of 3/NJG2 and his crew, found themselves heading towards Weston-on-the-Green. Here they managed to shoot down two Avro Ansons of No. 15 Service Flying Training School, killing both pilots. Then at extremely low level Bussmann's Ju 88 raced across the airfield releasing six SC50s that damaged seven Airspeed Oxfords. Heading back east they were near Ely when another target was spotted, this time a Blenheim belonging to 17 OTU. The Blenheim had just taken off from Upwood for night flying practice. Bussmann delivered a single burst of fire and the Blenheim fell in flames to crash near the village of Wilburton. Sadly, for the third time that night, all on board get were killed.

Bussmann and his crew returned in a jubilant mood to Gilze-Rijen. They landed very heavily, which caused the undercarriage to collapse and their aircraft slewed off the runway. The crew only just managed to vacate the night fighter before it burst into flames. Rolf Bussmann would survive the war with a final total of 26 confirmed victories

19th August 1941 another Wellington (R3005) was shot down north east of Barrington.

20th August 1941 Feldwebel Köster and his crew returned to the area, they shot down a Wellington bomber as it began its approach at Bassingbourn. Before they departed into the dark skies above they circled around again coming in at low level to strafe a stationary Wellington at the base.

3-4th October 1941 Feldwebel Alfons Köster was back in the area when his crew flew low over Oakington, opening fire on a Wellington of No. 101 Squadron that had just landed, three crew members were injured. A short while later Köster and his crew shot down Short Stirling N6085 coded MG-H from No. 7 Squadron that

crashed at Kisby's Hut near Bourn. This aircraft had taken off from Oakington and was heading home from a raid on the ports of occupied France. Failing to find their priority target of the U-Boat pens the crew dropped the bombs on targets of lesser strategic importance.

At 22.30 hours, just as they were approaching the area of Bourn airfield from the south, the sound of cannon fire could be heard above the roar of their engines. Köster had spotted the huge aeroplane and brought his night-fighter to bear on the target. The giant four engined bomber was covered in white flashes from cannon shells exploding as they slammed into one of the Stirling's wings. Immediately one engine caught fire and the conflagration quickly spread to the entire wing. Fortunately the night fighter broke off the engagement.

The Stirling pilot gave the order to bail out, one crew member shouting for the pilot, who was still at the controls, to get out too. However the pilot remained at his controls to give his men time to get out. The burning aircraft was seen flying over Papworth, it passed west over the church and carried on, approaching Kisby's Hut area. It gradually lost height, crashed through a line of trees and smashed into a field where it broke apart.

At first locals thought it was German aircraft down, but as they neared the scene from amidst huge sheets of flame the unmistakable tail fin of a Short Stirling was evident. It was possible to see the dead pilot still in his seat. A local ARP warden called Tom Ford managed to retrieve the pilot's body from the flames using a long stick.

A policeman arrived with one of the crew who had baled minutes before; this man told them that there were still several bombs on board. In the crash the bombs had been torn out of the bomb bay and had been thrown a considerable distance forwards. The bombs were discovered a short while later, lying on the surface of the field.



The advent of intruders over eastern England meant that bombers like these Stirlings could no longer be lined up in groups. Instead they were dispersed to far flung corners of the airfield sometimes miles away from the main buildings.

Tragedy over Shepreth

9 January 1942

Flying Fortress Mk.I

AN536

WP-M

No. 90 Squadron

Location:

Shepreth

Crew:

F/Lt S.A.P Fischer - killed

John Henson - killed

Peter Anthony Gibbs - killed

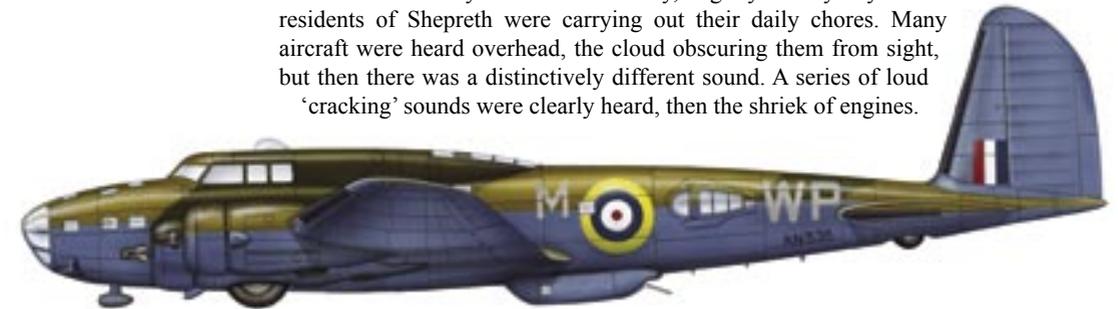
Donald Wilcox - killed

Robert Goold - killed

Robert Millar - killed

Broke up in the air

The 9th January 1942 was a cloudy, slightly drizzly day and the residents of Shepreth were carrying out their daily chores. Many aircraft were heard overhead, the cloud obscuring them from sight, but then there was a distinctively different sound. A series of loud 'cracking' sounds were clearly heard, then the shriek of engines.



13,000 feet above the small village B-17 Flying Fortress 'M-Mother' was on a training flight when the pilot got his bomber into a 'stall'. An aircraft stalls when the air flowing over its wings, and therefore keeping it aloft, no longer moves quickly enough; because the aircraft is flying too slowly, often in a climb. The aircraft started a spin that turned into an almost vertical dive. It broke through the cloud layer in a left-hand spin and then flew straight into the ground and caught fire. The aircraft had broken up in the air and small pieces lay scattered all over the village and in surrounding fields. The main section of wreckage fell in a small wood and orchard near to a stream. It was quickly cleared up by the RAF. All six of the crew were killed. Their bodies were taken from the wreck still wearing their parachutes. This is possibly because the pilot believed he could regain control and had not given the order to abandon the aircraft.

It is widely accepted that the American military did not believe the early B-17Cs to be combat ready, but the RAF, desperate for such aircraft, had an urgent need for them as high altitude bombers.

This aircraft had been built with the American serial number 40-2076 and was included in the first delivery of 20 B-17s to arrive in England under the terms of the USA's Lend Lease agreement. The RAF called these early B-17 models the Fortress I.

It was given the RAF serial AN536, WP-M, and was taken on charge on the 29th July 1941 to serve with No.90 Squadron at Polebrook.

A Dornier on Duchess Drive !

30-31 July 1942

Dornier Do217 E-4

Werk Nummer 5482

U5+ FP

6./KG2

Location:

Duchess Drive, Cheveley

Crew:

Hauptmann A Kindler (St. Kp) - PoW

Stabsfeldwebel A Schirmer - PoW

Oberfeldwebel W Kostka - PoW

Oberfeldwebel A Horch - PoW

All were sent to Canada, finally being repatriated to Germany in 1947

Shot down by anti aircraft fire

This Dornier 217 and its crew had taken off from Eindhoven in Holland at 00.17 hours and was part of a force of some 76 Luftwaffe aircraft that were scheduled to attack Birmingham. It is recorded that this particular aircraft was hit by AA fire either over the target or close to the crash site. The Civil Defence records for Newmarket state that this aircraft circled around the town twice before crashing at Cheveley. Interestingly these records also state that three Army lorries were burned out as a result of the Dornier crash.

When interrogated the crew stated that it was the starboard engine that had been hit. They claimed to have located their target, a factory to the northeast of Birmingham, and successfully dropped their bomb-load over it. The interrogator noted that the morale of this crew was very high and also that the attitudes of the observer and wireless operator, 'were arrogant and insolent'. The two remaining crew members including Kindler were assessed as being, 'security conscious but friendly and well disposed towards Britain'.

It is alleged that the crew baled out over Wood Ditton or perhaps Snailwell, whilst their stricken bomber carried on approaching Duchess Drive in Cheveley at a shallow angle. It then hit the ground in Cheveley Park estate, slewed along smashing through the park wall and into some trees at the top end of the drive by edge of the road running alongside Cheveley Park. When it finally came to rest the cockpit area had totally collapsed and had been smashed, the wings and their tips were torn away and engines partially dismounted. Both the fuselage and tail section were severely battered.

The Park at this time was occupied by the Army and there was even a searchlight unit just half a mile from the crash. As soon as the disintegrating aeroplane came to a stand still a fire broke out melting and blackening the wreckage and causing ammunition to explode. The Home Guard detachment at Wood Ditton was called out to look for and round up the crew. Looking for downed Luftwaffe aircrew was often a Home Guardsman's only opportunity to meet the enemy face to face.

Witnesses

Ted Rolfe, who was then in the Cheveley Home Guard, remembers going up to have a look at the Dornier crash when he was 17, shortly before being 'called up'. He was accompanied by his cousin Garnet and they were amongst the first on the scene. Garnet actually managed to take a photograph of the wreckage, but this has been lost over the years. Masses of ammunition lay about and he took some bullets home.

Another eye-witness, Doug Everitt, wrote:

"I can remember seeing the Dornier 217 which crashed in Duchess Drive. I was at school at the time, and in those days news soon got around if there was a plane crash. It seemed as it was returning from a raid somewhere, it got into trouble and the crew baled out leaving the aircraft unmanned. It came from the direction of Cheveley onto Duchess Drive, it passed through the boundary wall of Cheveley Park stud, leaving a large gap in the wall, damaging the trees as it passed through them. The final resting place of the Dornier was across the road where it stopped and then caught fire. The Home Guard was called out, but they were forced to take cover as the fire soon set the ammo to explode, the fire was put out and the guarding was handed over to the army who were stationed in the park. After a few days the RAF removed the wreck with what was called a Queen Mary trailer, when the main part was lifted it was seen that the clock was still working and it was soon removed by one of three RAF aircrew who had come to see it being salvaged. The German crew from the Dornier were, I think, picked up at Snailwell."



Rodney Vincent remembered:

"The plane was quite smashed up and hardly recognizable. I assume the wings had sheered off after contact with the tree." Rodney has written a superb book titled A Tanner Will Do which features this incident along with many other fascinating happenings throughout the war.

John Woollard wrote:

"The aircraft came down at a shallow angle with the props still turning, hit the ground inside Cheveley Park and bounced back into the air. Still travelling, it went through the boundary wall, over the road and into the trees on the other side.

It had completely disintegrated. The crash crew did a speedy and thorough job, leaving only a few bits of Perspex. For several years afterwards the site was marked by green puddles in wet weather, no doubt due to glycol-type coolant

having saturated the ground. The repaired section of wall was discernable for a long time.”

Crash Site Investigation

Next morning many village boys arrived at the scene. Walking up Duchess Drive towards Cheveley the bomber's wreckage could be seen across the road and sticking out from a group of trees on the right-hand side. It was a magnet for eagle-eyed schoolchildren looking for souvenirs such as fragments of alloy or machine gun shell cases. A few schoolboys looked on in envy as one young girl named Joyce Burling persuaded a soldier who was guarding the wreck to give her a piece from the cockpit area. The wreckage was soon hauled from amongst the trees, dismantled and taken away. Several eye-witnesses remember that it was three days before it was totally cleared.

RAF Air Intelligence Report 5/144

This aircraft was fitted with a dorsal turret in which was mounted a single MG 131 cannon using a Revi Type 16A gun sight. In addition to this only two smashed MG 15 machine guns could be immediately discernible amongst the debris.

Thrown clear of the wreckage were an example of an SC 50 bomb vertical release rack of the type also used in Heinkel He 111 bombers and a spring loaded hook that was assumed to be in relation to assisted take offs

Two canvas bags were found attached inside the fuselage which contained bomb hoisting gear for use when the aircraft was being loaded. One very interesting find was a label and wiring diagram that indicated that the fixed MG151 20mm cannon on this new E-4 model could be replaced by a MK 101 30mm cannon. This was a very heavy calibre weapon rarely used over Britain, only one example had ever been found in a crashed enemy aeroplane on British soil and that was an Me110 shot down in back in 1940 (See War Torn Skies Volume 1 Surrey). Despite being in a rather smashed state this was the best example of the new E4 variant to fall into British hands so far and several differences were able to be noted against the earlier E2 model.

The Crew

All baled out and were captured. After processing they were sent to Canada, finally being repatriated and arriving back in Germany in 1947.

This was a highly experienced crew from the 6th Staffel of KG2 the like of which the Luftwaffe could ill afford to lose. The pilot, Hauptmann Alfred Kindler, had been awarded the Iron Cross First and Second Class, as well as the Gold War Flights Badge. On the 8th March 1941 he had been awarded the Goblet of Honour, on 16th February 1942 he was awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold and on 24th August 1942 he was awarded the



Second from left stands Hauptmann Alfred Kindler the pilot of U5+FP the Dornier 217 that crashed at Cheveley he is shown posing with colleagues whilst a prisoner of war in Canada

The scars of war, incredibly two oak trees still bear evidence of this wartime incident this one being the most severe



The pilot, Alfred Kindler, died in 2004.

Author's Note:-Two of the oak trees were seriously damaged when the disintegrating bomber's wings smashed against them. These two trees still bear their wartime scars today, marked by large sections of bark missing from their trunks.

Ritterkreuz (Knights Cross). All the other members of this Dornier crew had been awarded the Goblet of Honour and the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold. Oberfeldwebel Alois Horch was awarded his Goblet of Honour for having completed 80 War flights.

66 Years On

For weeks afterwards small pieces of the Dornier were retrieved from the trees and the undergrowth. As in the case of many crashes it is almost certain that small pieces still remain at the site today. In Ted Rolfe's garden shed there does remain a small positively attributable artefact to this incident, a 13mm cannon shell case, definitely attributable because Ted took it from the scene 66 years ago.

The author would like to thank both Michael Symons and Rodney Vincent for their help in contacting eye-witnesses to this event. Thanks also to aviation archaeologists and researchers Bob Collis and Glyn Warren who supplied the photograph of Kindler and other KG2 colleagues taken in Canada whilst in captivity. For sometime I wondered if Joyce Burling still had her souvenir. Michael Symons managed to find her after all this time. The author spoke to Joyce Airey (nee Burling) in October 2007 and sadly, despite keeping hold of her section of Dornier for some years, it too is now lost. Joyce recalled that for years she would always ask her Mother, "Where's my piece of German?" as her mother used to move it about the house. Then followed several house moves and it would seem this piece of history got mislaid during these. However from her description it would appear to have been a considerable artefact, "about the size of the seat of a chair, with writing on it." Possibly it was a large access panel, or even part of the crew escape hatch door. Joyce also remembered that her granddad said that early the following morning he met a 'foreigner' who was just walking around the lanes, he couldn't understand what the man was saying so he walked on. Later he told Joyce that he thought it must have been one of the German airmen.

The Oakington Raider

30-31 July 1942

Junkers Ju88 A-5

Werk Nummer 5123

3Z+BW

12./KG77

Location:

Cuckoo Farm, Westwick

Crew:

Hauptmann D. Hepp - killed

Unteroffizier Wilhelm Boland - killed

Obergefreiter Hans Kröger - killed

Unteroffizier Johannes Sauter - killed

Shot down by anti aircraft fire

Two minutes after the Dornier smashed into trees at Cheveley, another German aircraft came down in Cambridgeshire; at Oakington. It plummeted downwards like a fiery comet through the night skies and was smashed to pieces and burned, as were the four airmen trapped inside.

The Ju88 approached the aerodrome area from the west at an altitude of about 4-5,000 feet. Earlier this crew are alleged to have had participated in a raid on the Midlands. It would appear that they failed to find their target, or perhaps became disorientated, and were looking for any target of opportunity on the way back. The Junkers began to circle around the Oakington district and dropped a solitary flare.

It was still circling when a string of small high explosive bombs (probably SC50s) were dropped just outside the airfield perimeter. It then came in at very low level, streaking across the airfield, and climbed up over a hangar and turned eastwards. By this time it was fully illuminated by the station searchlights. The aerodrome defences opened fire, as did servicemen with rifles and other small arms. Severely damaged and on fire the raider then climbed steeply until it was pointing almost vertically upwards. At about 5,000 feet it stalled. Lighting up the night sky



Fire blackened and twisted metal containing the shattered and cremated remains of four young German airmen is all that remains of 3Z+BW lying in a ripening wheat field at Oakington

with a trailing banner of roaring flame it fell into a vertical dive and smashed into the corner of a field on Cuckoo Farm.

Ralph Warboys saw the whole event:

"During the summer holiday of 1942 I was helping my uncle, Harry Brown, with the harvest on his farm at Childerley Gate on the A45 (now A428). Most of his land had been taken for Bourn aerodrome and the three hangars now visible from the main road were being built.

"Early one morning, (about 2 a.m.) I was woken by a German bomber circling overhead and I saw a flare coming down on a parachute, some of its cords I still have, and it set light to a shock (stook) of corn. My uncle and I went out and put the fire out with buckets of water and he told me to go one way round the buildings while he went the other to see if there were any more fires. While I was about halfway between the farm drive and the hangars near the trees, the plane still circling above, I heard the whistle of bombs. I threw myself flat on the ground and mercifully, although in the direct line of the stick of bombs, one fell between myself and the main road to my left and the others to my right; my life was spared.

The plane then went to Oakington and my parents watched it caught in searchlights and the anti - aircraft guns firing at it. They heard the gun crew behind Oakington House, Coles Lane, shout, "Got it" and saw it coming down in flames. It fell at Westwick near the brook about half a mile from Westwick Farm. My father, who was in the War Reserve Police, went to the crash but all the crewmen were dead. He said the smell was like that of roast beef, the bodies being badly burned."

On the following afternoon many villagers from Oakington tried to get closer to have a good look at the crashed German aeroplane. As usual schoolboys souvenir hunting were most successful at evading the guards posted at the site. Some of the souvenirs looted were quite gory, one schoolboy removed a blood spattered rib from the site .. and he still has it today, carefully secreted in an old brown cardboard box in his garage.

Dickie Haird felt very put out when one of his schoolboy chums was rooting around in the wreckage and found a small camera, complete with film still in it. When he went to see the actual crater the Junkers had made it was horrible, *"smashed ribs, blood, bone splinters arms and teeth lay everywhere."*

Crash Site Investigation.

The next morning the impact point was searched and a brown coloured Ausweis that had been issued by the FHK on 15th July was found in the burned wreckage. The only body that could be formally identified was that of Hauptmann D. Hepp. The other remains were so fragmentary and burned that they defied any identification at the time. Later on in the afternoon the local postlady's husband was walking his dog in the vicinity when the dog ran ahead and began showing interest in an item in a tussock of grass. At first it was believed to be a dead rabbit, but was soon seen to be a flying boot complete with a bloody smashed foot still inside, the dog was most reluctant to let go of its newly found trophy. The farmer was very reluctant to give the wartime recovery team access to the site because the whole

area was under crop, but under wartime regulations there was nothing he could do. Weeks later, when he was harvesting the area, his cutting machine was jammed up. Getting down to see what the cause was he saw that stuck fast in the mechanism was a decomposing arm. The crash site was well known by locals who still lived in the area in the early 1990s and with this valuable knowledge veteran aviation archaeologist Peter Stanley obtained authorisation and permission to excavate the remains of V4+ BW. Earlier checks of the site had revealed numerous fragments of twisted airframe, electrical components and sundry items including a large section of compressed radiator. A year before the excavation a man had found a 1 Pfennig coin and a burned silver German Wound Badge lying on the surface. Local people said that in the 1950s schoolchildren had dug into the crash site as part of a project and had recovered a propeller blade and some quite large sections of engine. Very early on a cold misty July morning in 1991 the sounds of a JCB could be heard rumbling over the flat fenland field. It stopped exactly where we had found the highest concentration of artefacts.

The excavation was down to a depth of only five feet before the oil staining and metal fragments turned to clean soil. Our aeroplane had chosen to crash into perhaps one of the hardest boulder clay and pebble bearing fields we had ever seen. The school children had beaten us to it.

66 Years On

Cuckoo Farm is no longer in existence; all that remains of where the farmhouse once stood is a square patch of ground elder and rough grass around some crumbling brickwork. The odd battered corroding white enamelled bowl and mug can be glimpsed amongst the patches of nettles. The crash site remains much in appearance as it did in 1942, surrounded by grassy drainage ditches with the odd ash tree here and there. It is possible to find fragments of V4+BW even today. Looking over the fields the large hangars at Oakington aerodrome can still be seen. It is easy to imagine the bleak Fenland scene with star-studded nights when enemy raiders returning from missions would race low over the flat land, desperately hoping to get home, a hope that lay shattered in a Cambridgeshire field for the crew of V4+BW.

THE 'BAEDEKER' RAIDS

For Cambridgeshire the most common Luftwaffe aircraft in this series of attacks was the Dornier Do 217E-4. In 1942 the German commanders decided to retaliate for the devastating raids the RAF had conducted against historic German towns. Their targets were to be 'cultural' targets such as ancient and historic cities, and their guidebook was the pre-war Baedeker tourist guide to Britain.

Cambridge Town itself received some enemy attention during this phase of Luftwaffe operations, but damage was slight. Several Dornier 217s were seen by eye-witnesses held in searchlights over Cambridge and its surrounding areas in this period. One eyewitness in 1942 claims to have seen a giant four-engined enemy aircraft held in searchlights over Cambridge City, in reality an RAF 'heavy'.

Stirling - Missing for 64 Years

27 August 1942

Short Stirling Mk.I

W7624

LS-E

No. XV Squadron

Location:

Bentelo, Holland

Crew:

F/Sgt Hugh Barton-Smith (26) - killed

F/ Sgt Kenneth Wakefield (20) - killed

Sgt Leonard Moss (28) - killed

Sgt John Victor Robinson (23) - killed

Sgt Peter Sharman (20) - killed

F/Sgt Edward Talbot (30) - killed

F/Sgt Glen Allen Smith (24) - killed

Shot down by German night fighter

**Stirling LS-E of
XV Squadron
being escorted
by Hurricanes on
a daylight raid to
France 7th July 1941**

On the night of August 27th 1942 Stirling Mk.I, W7624, L-SE, took off from Bourn airfield and slowly climbed over the Cambridgeshire countryside before setting course for its target, the German industrial town of Kassel. On board that night were seven young men who, in just a matter of an hour or so would fall in a Dutch field. Climbing higher and higher everything was fine, the coast of Occupied Europe was crossed and they continued towards the target. Near Bentelo in Holland night fighter pilot Oberleutnant Viktor Bauer of 3./NJG1 was patrolling, looking for inbound RAF bombers. He spotted W7624 and began to line up for attack. The first bursts of cannon fire caught the bomber totally unaware and within seconds it had become a mass of flames spiralling earthwards.

The huge bomber smashed into the ground near the village of Bentelo with a large explosion as the heavier parts like the engines buried themselves 30 feet into the soft soil. Trapped on board was the crew, only the tail gunner survived but he was so badly injured that he died the next day. The German authorities managed to



The Orwell Dornier

extract two bodies from the smoking crater, and buried three airmen at the time of the incident. For 64 years their colleagues' remains lay entangled in a mass of oil-soaked, contorted aluminium. They were officially listed as 'missing'.

In 2006 the Royal Dutch Air Force recovery team came across some wreckage and made plans to recover the aircraft, which they had established was a Stirling bomber. Months of careful and detailed excavation led to the discovery of engine serial numbers and personal items confirming this as W7624. Also unearthed were four 2,000lb bombs. During the excavation some human remains were positively identified. The remains of two other bodies were found with no personal effects and in such a poor condition and that they could not be identified. Relatives could now be notified that their 'missing' next of kin had finally been found. Families of the crew travelled from all over the world to attend the funeral with full military honours at Ambt-Delden Cemetery, where these brave young men were finally laid to rest. The remains of the two air crew that could not be identified were fittingly placed in a single coffin that lies alongside their comrades.



Above;
A section of engine and some of the 2000 lb bombs recovered from the crash site of L-SE.



Left;
Some of the crew are finally laid to rest

Below;
The lost souls of W7624



8-9 September 1942

<p>Dornier Do217 E-4 Werk Nummer 5123 F8+AP 6./KG40 on loan to 1./KG2 Location: Rectory Farm, Orwell</p>	<p>Crew: Feldwebel A. Witting - killed Oberfeldwebel F. Heusser - killed Obergefreiter A. Hoppe - killed Unteroffizier A. Eysoldt - killed</p>
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Shot down by Flying Officer I. A McRitchie and Flight Sergeant E. S. James in a Mosquito of No. 151 Squadron

This Dornier 217 was no stranger to the skies of Cambridgeshire; on the 2nd August 1942 it had taken part in an attack on Cambridge town itself. During this raid two of its crew, Oberfeldwebel Wilhelm Schnitzer and Oberfeldwebel Georg Kittelmann, were wounded. After this the aircraft was transferred to KG2, with a different crew and was on this night operating from Gilze Rijen in Holland. The most likely reason for this is that it was borrowed by 1./KG2 to make up for losses suffered on 19th August.

On September 8th 1942 the Dornier took off at about 9 p.m. from Gilze Rijen airfield, and crossed the British coastline at an altitude of 11,000 feet.



Dornier 217E-4 F8+AP prepares for take off

By 23.10 hours F8+AP was in the western area of Cambridge and began randomly dropping bombs and flares all over the place. Some of these bombs fell on University Farm at Girton and others fell on Bourn airfield. Also in the area was a Mosquito night fighter. No. 151 Squadron's Flying Officer I. A McRitchie and Flight Sergeant E. S. James were on a routine patrol in Mosquito Mk.II DD669. They had taken off from Wittering and were orbiting a searchlight beacon at an altitude of 12,000 feet.

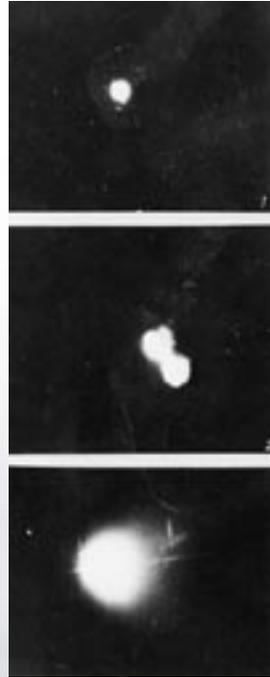
Approximately 15 miles away they spotted searchlights, but as they flew nearer the searchlights went out and locating their target proved to be somewhat of a problem as neither of the crew could get a visual sighting or an AI contact. Then another cone of searchlights was spotted to the south and they clearly saw a flare falling. The Mosquito crew obtained an AI contact from near these searchlights at 10,000feet. As they watched the blip on the cathode ray screen spread, indicating that bombs were being dropped by the target aircraft. Other blips appeared on the screen and appeared to be falling downwards to 2000 feet. Then their AI contact was lost, but bombs were seen exploding on the ground. Seconds later another AI contact was obtained. They began to follow this contact and obtained a visual on a Dornier 217 1,500 feet away, flying at an altitude of 6-7,000 feet.

As the gap closed a burst of 13mm machine gun fire from the Dornier's dorsal turret flashed in the darkness. Several rounds slammed into the Mosquito's starboard wing and engine. Accurate fire from the Dornier 217 had caused considerable problems as the damaged engine began to over-heat, but McRitchie was still able to pursue his quarry. Turning in from about 300 yards behind the enemy raider the gap began to close. McRitchie opened fire. The Dornier pilot began taking violent evasive manoeuvres.

With the Mosquito closing the gap, the residents of Haslingfield, some 6,000 feet below, heard both machine gun and the steady thump of cannon fire up in the night sky. Several people saw threads of tracer shells streaking away in long lines. Despite the evasive action the Mosquito's 20mm cannon shells flashed and exploded on the Dornier's engine, cockpit and fuselage. Several large sections of the aluminium skinning peeled back and were ripped away in the slipstream to flutter and spiral past the Mosquito.

As well as 20mm shells the smaller 0.303 rounds from the Mosquito spattered into the Dornier. The fuselage began to glow a dull red colour as the Dornier turned to port. A second burst from the Mosquito tore into the raider's port engine and this immediately caught fire. The third and final burst of fire from the Mosquito raked the Dornier's port wing. Almost immediately the Dornier was engulfed in a huge sheet of flame that streaked back towards the Mosquito.

The Dornier slowly assumed an inverted position, and over the village of Orwell the cockpit area exploded. The bomber dived at a 45



degree angle over the Wimpole to Cambridge road, then crashed into a large field at Rectory Farm.

There was a huge explosion that illuminated the surrounding woodlands and hills, as several of the Dornier's bombs exploded. As soon this died down to a faint glow above the rooftops the crackle and pop of exploding ammunition could be heard. The bomber instantly disintegrated and was driven deep into the ground by the larger and heavier sections. The BMW 801 radial engines shattered on impact, cylinder pots being sheared away as the heavy reduction gearing and propeller bosses smashed down five feet into the clay.

Several propeller blades were torn out from the bosses and were flung far out across the field. Three bodies were recovered from the wreck and another was in the next field. Such was the violence of the impact that one man was decapitated, his head being found later in a nearby ditch. Large sections of airframe and other small pieces of the Dornier were spread over 150 yards.

Witnesses

People vividly remember the blazing Dornier passing over and the awful screaming, roaring, noise that it made. One said, "*it passed so low over my house that if I had held a broom up it would have been knocked out of my hands.*" On duty that night with the Orwell Home Guard under the command of John Neaves was Corporal Maurice Pearce. Maurice was interviewed in August 2007, then aged 90!

His commanding officer had received a phone call stating that there was a German plane in the vicinity and that parachutists may be present. Maurice had

Dornier 217s taxi out for a mission over England

Inset; One of their number being shot down by an RAF night fighter

