

BROMBOROUGH Ju88

On Tuesday the 8th October 1940, a Junkers Ju88 took off from its base in France, loaded with four 250 kg bombs, to attack industrial targets of opportunity connected with military production in the Merseyside area, and photograph the results. The route took it from Caen to Southampton then via Droitwich and finally to Merseyside arriving in the target area around 4:00 pm in the afternoon. The weather forecast that the German pilot was using had indicated that he would have cloud cover during the flight, which did help him evade fighters in southern England.

Les Jones was on look out duty on the top of George Henry Lee department store in the centre of Liverpool. He spotted the lone Ju88 flying up the River Mersey at about 1,200 feet. Squadron Leader H.W. (Tubby) Mermagen was the Station Commander at Speke and was in the operations room where the incoming raid was being plotted. At Speke No.312 (Czech) squadron kept a section of three aircraft at readiness, with another section of three aircraft at 30 minutes readiness. He gave the order for three Hurricanes of yellow section to be scrambled and patrol Hoylake. They took off at 4:10 pm. The section consisted of Yellow 1 Flight Lieutenant D.E. Gillam, Yellow 2 Pilot Officer A. Vasatko, and Yellow 3 Sergeant J. Stehlik.

No.289 AA Battery of the 93rd Regiment of the Royal Artillery located at the Ince gun site had been alerted to the approach of an enemy aircraft and the guns were manned and loaded ready for action. The Ju88 approached from the direction of Helsby and flew over the gun site heading northwest. The four guns were brought to bear on the Ju88. The Gun Control Officer (GCO) Captain J. Blundell because of the possibility of friendly fighters being around, hesitated to give the order to engage the Ju88. But No.1 gun, no doubt excited by having an enemy aircraft in their sights had opened up with their 4.5 gun. As the Hurricanes roared into sight, the GCO ordered cease-fire.

Yellow section were climbing after take off, still with their wheels down, when Sergeant Stehlik, saw bursts of fire from AA guns, which drew his attention to the Ju88. On sighting the Hurricanes the Ju88 started to climb sharply trying to gain cloud cover. Pilot Officer Vasatko's Combat Report held in the Public Record Office describes the action: *'I was Yellow 2 and started close behind Yellow leader, staying about 20 yards behind. On turning over the river Yellow leader started to climb sharply and looking round I sighted the E/A (Enemy Aircraft). I gave full gas, turned to port and flew about 60 feet below the E/A from quarter but could not fire on account of the presence of Yellow 3, I turned and climbed and attacked E/A from rear and above (about 2 seconds at 100 yards). Immediately afterwards, I saw Yellow 1 attack E/A from below, I broke away slightly to right and saw E/A smoking from starboard engine and gliding downward. I followed at 1200-1500 feet distance and approached, but could not fire at once as Yellow 3 was attacking. I then fired a short burst and experienced return fire from the upper gunner. E/A then flew level at a height of 200 feet and I attacked from the stem and gave a third short burst and saw the E/A fall flat on the ground and slew round to port. It lies on a meadow at the edge of the waterborne Balloon Barrage.'*



Painting "Fastest Victory" by Robert Taylor

During the firefight, which lasted just over 5 minutes the Ju88's starboard engine was damaged in a hail of bullets, which also killed the observer/second pilot Leutnant H. Schlegel with a bullet through the head. The Ju88 pilot Oberleutnant H. Bruckmann jettisoned two of its four bombs into the River Mersey in an attempt to escape. Heavy and accurate fire was returned from the Ju88, which hit all three Hurricanes.

The damage the Ju88 sustained was so bad that the pilot was unable to keep the aircraft in the air. The Ju88 was spotted by witnessed on the ground gliding past Bromborough Church towards Bromborough Docks with smoke billowing from it.



Ju88 final approach



Crash site map

The aircraft crashed landed on reclaimed land at Bromborough Dock with the undercarriage retracted and two bombs still in their racks, it slid on its belly across the field and stopped, slewing round to port, it was 4:15 pm. The port engine had been ripped out of its mountings and one of the remaining bombs torn from its rack and lay near the aircraft along with a dinghy, which had inflated because of the crash landing.



Detached bomb from Ju88



RAF officers inspect the Ju88

Harry Gill, a gateman at Bromborough dock who was about 200 yards from the crashed Ju88 ran towards the aircraft. As he ran, he saw two men scramble out of the cockpit and go behind the aircraft. He found them bent over a third man lying on the ground some way behind the aircraft. Gill demanded their guns, which they surrendered without argument. At that point two Unilever employees, Mr. W.A. Rand from the electrical department and Rob Thompson assistant manager of fuel & steam department arrived. Thompson, who had been cycling by when the aircraft crashed, escorted one of the Germans to the Dock Gatehouse to be kept in custody until the military authorities arrived. Men from the Local Defence Volunteer (LDV) units of Unilever and Fawcett Preston arrived to control the growing crowds.

The two men who had scrambled from the cockpit were the pilot Oberleutnant H. Bruckmann a tall fair haired man, and Unteroffizier H. Weth the wireless operator/gunner, the man on the ground was Sonderfuhrer H. Lehmann. Lehmann was in the ventral gondola under the cockpit acting as rear gunner. He had detached the gondola from the aircraft at a height of about 3 feet just before the aircraft crash-landed. He had suffered bullet wounds and broken legs. Gill and Rand made a makeshift splint using a shunter's pole for Lehmann legs. Weth who had suffered a slight injury and Lehmann were taken under guard by ambulance to Clatterbridge hospital for treatment. Leutnant Schlegel was later buried with full military honours in Hooton Village Church. In 1962 his body was transferred to the German military cemetery at Cannock Chase, Staffordshire.

Eventually Harry Gill was able to look around the Ju88. He found maps of Merseyside, which clearly detailed buildings and storage tanks in the Port Sunlight factory and Bromborough dock.

The victorious Hurricane pilots landed back at Speke completing what would possibly be the fastest shooting down of an enemy aircraft. About 12 minutes from take off to touch down. The pilots got a hearty reception when they landed and were carried shoulder high by their comrades, a large number of station personnel and local civilians witnessed the event, including those on a local bus going past the Airport. So great was the interest that the airport gates had to be closed the following day when crowds of local civilians arrived wanting to congratulate the pilots. No.312 (Czech) Squadron had only become operational in late September 1940, and this was their first action.

Flight Lieutenant Gillam got into his car, and drove through the Mersey Tunnel to the scene of the crash. There he cut a badge off the side of the aircraft together with the Swastika on the starboard side of the fin for a souvenir. Returning to Speke it was hung in the hut at the squadron dispersal. After the war, Flight Lieutenant Gillam presented the panel with the Swastika to RAF Finingley. Sadly following the closure of Finingley the panel is now missing. It has been reported that a paddle from the dinghy, which had a plaque mounted on it and a painting entitled 'The Fastest Victory' painted by Robert Taylor and signed by Flight Lieutenant Gillam has been seen for sale on an Internet site.



George Knut from Willaston, an RAF armourer based at Hooton Park was dispatched to look after the armament and took the machine guns back to Hooton Park. On examination, the aircraft was found to have fifty .303 bullet strikes in it. The bombsight was of great interest to the RAF as it was a new type and the first to fall into their hands. The aircraft was removed three days later, and the Commander of the Merseyside Garrison said that the aircraft was to be put on public view in connection with 'War Weapons Week' in Liverpool the following week. In the meantime it was moved to the Oval Recreation Ground Bebington where it was placed on display to the public. More than £70 was collected for the Mayor of Babington's 'Spitfire Fund'. On the 18th October, the Ju88 was paraded through the streets of Liverpool and then displayed at St George's Plateau alongside a Messerschmitt Bf.109.

Mrs Anstead-Browne a member of the WVS, and organizer of the Neston Spitfire Fund, secured the use of the Ju88 as a means of revenue for their Spitfire Fund. The Ju88 was transported on two low loaders to Parkgate where it was placed on view in a field off Bevyl Road, which adjoined the Parade. A charge of 6d for an adult and 3d for children was made to view the aircraft. It caused great interest with the locals and attracted crowds. The bomber remained there until the 24th of November when it was taken to RAF Sealand and disposed of.

Arthur Draper, who was eight years old at the time, remembers the Ju88 arriving on low loaders, the fuselage on one and the wings on the other. They were placed together so that it looked as though it had just belly-landed. "I took a bit of the tail fin, which was lying on the ground. It was dark green and smelled like rotten cheese. I put it in our shed but my dad made me throw it away as it had such a terrible smell." Quite a number of those who saw the aircraft thought it had come down at Parkgate. Local boys were very keen to collect souvenirs, and so the Little Neston Company of the Home Guard guarded the aircraft at night.

Eddie Scott remembers: "The Little Neston company of the Home Guard was charged with the responsibility for protecting it from the depredations of souvenir-hunters. Half-dozen of us detailed for the task made our way to the rendezvous, an empty house behind what is now the Parkgate Hotel and mounted a patrolling guard in pairs for the standard two hours on and four off. I remember the four off particularly for the hardness of the bare floor and the inadequacy of the single blanket, and the two on for the inky blackness of the night".

Maurice Jones went to see the aircraft: "There were plenty of people there and it poured with rain. It was a very miserable day. Corrugated sheets had been put on the ground round the plane, as it was so wet. A wing had come off the plane but was laid out, as it should have been. There was a long line of people waiting to go in, and you went in through the door the crew had used. It was the first German object of war I had ever seen. I went in and sat in the pilot's seat and I can remember a lady saying they needed terribly long legs to reach the pedals".

In 1990, local aviation historian, the late Dougie Darroch, founder of the Warplane Wreck Museum at Fort Perch, New Brighton succeeded in tracing the pilot, Helmuth Bruckmann to his home in Munich. He was hoping to get Bruckmann to return to the scene of the incident on its 50th anniversary. But Bruckmann was involved with the celebration of the reunification of Germany and was therefore unable to. However on Friday 1st November 1991, following arrangements made by Monty Lister and Dougie Darroch, Helmuth Bruckmann took off from the playing fields of Wirral Grammar School in a Jet Ranger helicopter (G-BAKS) and landed at the crash site just over 51 years since he had crash-landed there. The Mayor & Mayoress of Wirral (Councillor and Mrs Gordon Paterson), eyewitnesses to the original action, the press were there to greet him along with John Petric from Lubrizol who now owned the land on which he crashed. This was followed by a reception at Bebington Civic Centre at which Bruckmann was presented with among other things, a painting of the dramatic events by renowned local aviation artist Malcolm Kinnear, and a mounted piece of the Ju88 from Dougie Darroch's collection at Perch Rock.



Malcolm Kinnear's painting

Bruckmann had hoped to meet, Denys Gillam but Gillam had unfortunately died of a heart attack only a few weeks earlier. Later Bruckmann visited the Military Cemetery at Cannock Chase where Herbert Schegel had been reinterred. Following this there was a trip to Ambleside in the Lake District where he had been held as a prisoner of war before being sent to Canada for the duration of the war.

REPORTS & WITNESS STATEMENTS

Speke intelligence officer, Pilot Officer Phillips reports from the three pilots.

'Yellow section had just received the order to patrol Hoylelake and were still near the aerodrome at a height of 1,000 feet, when a Ju88 was sighted by anti aircraft positions up river, the bursts attracting the attention of yellow 3 which sighted the Ju88 flying slowly westwards at 1,200 feet. The Ju88 then in turn sighted our formation and climbed sharply trying to gain cloud cover. Shortly before entering, the Ju88 received a burst from Yellow 3 which was followed by continual attacks from Yellow 1 (continuous astern attacks) Yellow 2 and 3 which weaved in and out attacking from below and above principally from the rear on account of bad visibility. The Ju88 received bursts from Yellow 1 and 3 while still climbing through cloud and started gliding downwards. Yellow 2 and 3 doing quarter attacks. By this time both of the Ju88's engines were on fire and it was seen by yellow 2 and a large number of ground observers to fall flat down on a meadow on the left bank of the Mersey. During combat heavy and accurate return fire was experienced from the Ju88 up to the last moment before the crash. Slight damage was sustained by all our aircraft a bullet hitting the windscreen of Yellow 1 another the exhaust manifolds of Yellow 2 while Yellow 3 sustained damage to the petrol tank and the gun pipe line (He states in his individual report he returned thinking all his ammunition had gone). Cine guns were not carried. Anti Aircraft fire was ceased immediately our fighters came into action'



The damage to Yellow 1 windshield

Denys Gillam memoirs

'We were scrambled on 8th October in poor visibility. With our wheels still down we spotted this Ju88 being engaged by AA fire. My two wingmen began to chase it as I pulled up into a climbing turn. As my two Czechs engaged him I rolled or rather slid off the top of the climb right under it, the Ju88 was only at 1,000 feet. When I had enough power I pulled up and got a very close shot and it went down and crash landed with both engines on fire on the other side of the Mersey, about half a mile or so from the airfield. I continued round, lowered my wheels and put back down on the runway. It must have been one of the fastest Fighter Command kills on record. I had a bullet hit my windscreen; in fact the German gunner scored hits on all three hurricanes. Taking my car, I drove through the Mersey Tunnel to the scene of the crash just as the crew was being rounded up. The pilot was dead but the others had survived although the gunner and wireless operator had been injured. I cut the German badge off the side of the aeroplane together with one of the swastikas for souvenirs, then returned to Speke.'

Harry Gill gateman at Bromborough Dock

'The air raid siren had sounded but in those days nobody paid much attention to them. I was on duty at the South Gatehouse at Bromborough dock, when a twin-engined aeroplane plunged out of the clouded sky and crashed about 200 yards away on land reclaimed from the River Mersey. I ran towards it and half way there I looked up and saw a swastika on the tail fin. Two men were scrambled out of the cockpit and ran behind the damaged wing. The two Germans who were tall and well built were bending over a third airman lying at their feet. I sized them by the epaulettes of their uniforms and demanded their guns, which they surrendered without argument. Mr Rand and Thompson then appeared at my side; Mr Thompson took charge of one of the Germans and escorted him to the Dock Gatehouse to be kept in custody until the military authorities arrived. One of the crew was found to be dead at the controls. Alongside the Ju88 was a fully inflated dinghy, and two unexploded bombs, which had fallen from the aircraft as it bounced along the ground, were lying near the smoking port engine. At that stage of the war, a military unit was stationed near the dock and they mounted a guard over the aircraft until it was removed by the RAF. The Air force were very concerned with the bombsight as it was a new type and was the first to fall in our hands, they carefully dismantled it and brought it to the Gatehouse where my colleagues and I kept it under guard until it was taken away. That evening we were visited by the three pilots who shot the Ju88 down, having been the first to approach the Ju88, it seemed a fitting conclusion to an exiting day when I shook hands with the victors'



Cockpit of Ju88



The inflated dinghy being inspected

Frank "Doc" Holmes

'On the 8th October 1940 I was standing my doorstep at 30 Ashfield road when the sirens sounded. In the air above us was a German Ju88 with three of our fighters chasing it and it was firing back at them. The fighters were Hurricanes. The Ju88 veered and nearly hit Bromborough church steeple, but the fighters got the better of it and shot it down near Bromborough dock. I had a good idea where it crashed, so I picked up my eldest boy Barry aged 6 years, put him on the crossbar of my bicycle, and made my way to where the Ju88 had come down. When we arrived the crew had been removed from the plane. The pilot, only a very young man was killed and the co pilot was wounded. The machine gunner was not too badly hurt. They were all taken to Clatterbridge Hospital. It was a sad sight to see, but that is war. A pilot arrived on the scene about 15 minutes after the Ju88 was shot down he had come all the way from Speke Airport where he had left his Hurricane. He was also a very young man. He cut the German badge off the side of the Ju88, also one of the Swastikas, got back in his car and left for Speke and home. Of course the Army were called in to guard the Ju88 and surround it with ropes and posts. There was a bunch of keys lying on the ground near the plane, which I picked up and gave to one of the soldiers on guard and while doing so had a quick look inside, I was sorry I did because it was not a petty site at all. I did notice that in the glove compartment of the Ju88 there was a bar of Cadbury's Chocolate and a pack of Churchman's cigarettes which must have come from the Dunkirk campaign.'

There are a couple interesting points from Holmes report. He confused the pilot with the observer/second pilot who was killed. If the Hurricane pilots had arrived 15 minutes after the Ju88 had been shot down, his car must have done a bit of low flying.

Ron Wright of Eastham

'It was an amazing experience. I was on my way home from school to where I lived in the ICI houses at Pool Woods, just behind the trees. I saw the aircraft flashing past the houses at almost rooftop level and I thought it was going to crash on them, you could hear the rat-a-tat from the three Hurricanes guns. The Hurricanes forced the German bomber down in Bromborough Dock. A handful of us young kids rushed up to the wrecked plane, way ahead of the security services. There were three crew, I think, two were out of the plane in a daze, but the third was dying. He was asking for a cigarette and a factory worker, who'd arrived by now, gave him one, but one of his mates kicked it away. At the same time, the Hurricanes were doing victory-rolls overhead. I was gobsmacked by it all'

Dennis Housley who lived in Magazine Village

Dennis was one of three 12 & 13 year old boys who had a half-day off from school and are out on the Mersey in a small rowing boat. He remembers that the weather was overcast with a slight mist in the air and that he was in the Eastham Channel with Alan Gratrix and Ronnie Hill. They heard explosions from the direction of Speke, but couldn't see anything at that time, so thought they had better go home. Just then Frank Rogers the Gunpowder Magazines Foreman started waving frantically from the beach at the end of Magazine Village. The boys beached their boat, as the noise grew louder. Frank urged them towards the small cliff on the beach and told them to keep flat against the cliff. He said, *"it's a dogfight"*, and there was a Ju88 being fired on by Hurricanes. Pieces were flying off the German aircraft and were dropping into the mud on the shore, and smoke was pouring out of the engines.

The aircraft had gone over the dock wall, and disappeared within seconds. Dennis said, *"She's down on the dock"* Frank looked concerned, and replied, *"I'll get my gun"*, and went off to get it. The Ju88 had just scraped over the dock wall by about 6 feet. Running towards the aircraft, Dennis watched as one of the Hurricanes did a climbing *'Victory Roll'* over the scene.



Representation of crash by the son of Dennis Housley

After a short time a Local Defence Volunteer (LDV) arrived on the scene and tried to keep the crowd back with a gun. He was told in no uncertain terms to *"point the gun at the bloody Jerry's"*. Dennis liberated the wingtip and made off with it included the landing light, the bulb of which had marked on it *'OSRAM. Made in England'*. His father later got agreement with a member of the RAF team, that it was ok for Dennis to keep it. Dennis's friend Ronnie made off with a forage cap from one of the crew. The wingtip was given away in various pieces over the following years. At Woodslee School the next day Dennis and his two friends had to stand up in front of the school and re-tell what they saw.

In 1991, during Helmuth Bruckmann visit, Dennis went along to meet him and appeared on BBC TV's *'Look North'* piece on the incident.

Birkenhead News 12th October

The Birkenhead News reported the incident on the 9th of October with just a few lines. In the 12th October issue, they reported the incident more fully with a picture of the Ju88 with the headline 'One Less To Come Again!' As well as reporting the incident they reported comments from a 'Captured Nazi airman about nineteen year old'. How the paper obtained the comments is a mystery, one can only assume that the Nazi was Bruckmann although he was 26 years old. The paper reported that 'the Nazi spoke excellent English, which he said he learnt at school and that this had been his fifth visit to the area'.

He had commented on how in spite of Dr. Goebbels efforts, Germans were beginning to doubt the number of British air losses. He was convinced that Germany was invincible for he had been told that London had been razed to the ground and it would only be a short time before England was beaten. What he could not understand was why people here seemed so content and why, although there had just been an air raid they were going cheerfully about normal tasks. Regarding starvation in Germany, he said 'that there were good stocks of wheat and tomatoes but the rationing of other articles particularly meat and butter is very stringent'. An interesting comment. He went on to comment that 'German airman, were repeatedly told that if they came down over England they would not be taken prisoner'. He said with a cheerful grin "But we have no complaint to make about your hospitality so far". The paper went onto comment about the fliers flying boots with leather soles but the uppers of canvas lined with wool.

THE GERMAN AIRCRAFT

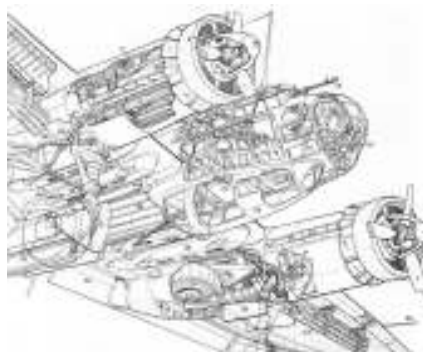
The Ju88 type had made its maiden flight in 1936. Designed as a high-speed bomber, it also served as a long-range reconnaissance aircraft, and some were equipped for close air support with one 75mm cannon and two 37mm cannons. It was also used as a night-fighter, with on board radar. At the end of the war, some Ju88 were even converted into radio-controlled flying bombs. Eventually 14,780 Ju88 were produced.

The Bromborough Junkers was a Ju88A-1 built by Norddeutsche Dornier Werke under license from Junkers and was accepted in May 1940. Its Werke Nummer (Work Number) was 4068. Junkers had built the port engine and Mitteldeutsche Motoren Werke of Leipzig built the starboard engine.



Data plates from the Ju88

The aircraft carried the code 'M7+DK' where the 'M7' indicated that it was part of Kampfgruppe KGr806. The 'K' indicated the Staffle (squadron) within the group, in this case No.2 Staffel, and the 'D' indicated the individual aircraft within the Staffel. There was a crest painted on the nose, which depicted a German eagle in flight carrying an Iron Cross with a small Swastika superimposed on red, white and blue concentric circles, the inner ring was partly green and partly white, this was probably the crews own badge. Part of this badge can be seen at Doug Darroch's Warplane Wreck Investigation Group Museum in Fort Perch Rock, New Brighton.



Typical Ju88

Ju.88A-1 Specification

Crew	Pilot, Observer (second pilot), Radio operator/gunner, Ventral rear gunner	
Engines	Liquid cooled, 12-cylinder inverted-Vee, Junkers Jumo 211B-1 (or G-1) of 1,210 hp each.	
Max speed	280 mph with normal operational load	
Max ceiling	32,150 feet	
Range	620 miles	
Weights	Empty 16,975 lbs	Loaded 22,840 lbs
Wingspan	60 ft 3¼ in	
Length	47 ft 2½ in	
Height	17 ft 5¾ in	
Armament	Three 7.92mm machine guns, 1 firing forward (pilot), 1 upper rear (radio operator), and 1 rear ventral gondola.	

THE GERMAN SQUADRON & CREW

KGr806 was part of Generalfeldmarschall Hugo Sperrle's Luftflotten (Air fleet) 3, with this aircraft based at Caen-Carpignet in France. KGr806 was formed in September 1939, originally as a coastal bomber reconnaissance unit, which was absorbed into the Luftflotte 3 as an orthodox bomber group, retaining its nucleus of naval officers. It was based at Nantes with a detachment at Caen. Originally equipped with Heinkel He111, it was re-equipped with Ju88A-1 before and during the Battle of Britain. KGr806 later saw operational service on the Eastern Front and the Mediterranean.

Oberleutnant (RAF rank Flying Officer) Helmuth Bruckmann

Helmuth Bruckmann, the pilot was born Hamburg in 1914. He graduated from school in Emden in 1934 and enlisted in the German Navy the same year, commencing flying training in 1936. He was promoted to Oberleutnant in 1939 and was made Commanding Officer of a coastal reconnaissance squadron, and subsequently Director of a pilot training school. Early in WWII he became deputy Squadron Leader in a bomber wing, regularly flying He111 and Ju88 aircraft. The operation on 8th October was his 36th operational missions and his 5th to Merseyside. After a week's interrogation at Cockfosters in London, Bruckmann was transported to Grizdale Hall in the Lake District for 3 months before being moved to Glasgow to board the *'Duchess of York'* to sail to Canada to see out the rest of the war.

After the war he joined the Luftwaffe general staff and was promoted to Major. On leaving the Luftwaffe Bruckmann studied languages and literature at university from 1946 to 1958 and became director of the Goethe Institute in Munich. He rejoined the Luftwaffe and in 1959, became a Lt. Colonel in the Ministry of Defence at Bonn. After a period as Commander of a cadet-training wing in the Luftwaffe Officers Training School in Munich, he was promoted to full Colonel in 1961 and transferred to the German Embassy in Washington D.C. USA as air attaché. After an additional assignment as the German Military representative with the NATO committee, he returned to Germany as head of the Military Studies Group in the German Ministry of Defence. He retired in 1973.



Drawing of Bruckmann after WWII



Bruckmann November 1991

Leutnant (RAF rank Pilot Officer) Herbert Schlegel

Herbert Schlegel the aircrafts observer/second pilot aged 24, was killed by a bullet wound to the head, and was originally buried at Hooton Village Churchyard. His body was moved in 1962 to the German military cemetery at Cannock, Staffordshire, block No.3, grave No.117.



Unteroffizier (RAF rank Corporal) Helmuth Weth

Helmuth Weth was the 26 year-old wireless operator/gunner.

Sonderfuhrer Horst Lehmann

Horst Lehmann was 37 years old. In English, Sonderfuhrer translates to Specialist Leader. They had special linguistic or technical skills, but lacked the necessary military training. They wore standard military uniforms, and had officer rank without a commission. They only had authority within the area covered by their specialist skills. Lehmann was a "Bildberichter" (Photographic War Correspondent) from Luftwaffe's No.2 Propaganda Company, on board to photograph the outcome of the raid. Lehmann recovered sufficiently from his injuries to be able to be repatriated on crouches in 1943.

No.312 (CZECH) SQUADRON & PILOTS

No.312 (Czech) Squadron came into being as the second Czechoslovak fighter unit. It was formed on 29th August 1940 as part of No.9 Group Fighter Command. The squadron was based around experienced pilots, who had already had combat experience during the Battle of France, and many of who had more than one victory. On the 6th September 1940, the pilots began preparation for flying Hurricanes at RAF Duxford.



On the 26th September the squadron moved to its new home, at Speke airport. There the unit completed its training and in last days of September. On the 2nd October 1940, the squadron was declared operational with the task of protecting the Merseyside area from enemy raids. The squadrons motto was, '*Non multi sed multa*' - '*Not many but much*' and the squadron badge was, A stork Volant. The stork in the badge relates to the French 'Escadrille des Cygelines' with whom the original pilots of No 312 (Czech) squadron had flown.

Two days after their first victory in downing the Bromborough Ju88. Sergeant Otto Hanzlicek aged 29, took off from Speke along with Pilot Officer Dvorak to practice '*dog fights*'. At 2:15pm, the engine of Hanzlicek Hurricane caught fire and he was forced to abandon the aircraft near the Oglett. He bailed out, and the wind took him out over the River Mersey, where he fell into the river, some 300-400 yards from the riverbank, and was drowned. The aircraft came down in the river off the end of runway 08 at Speke. Hanzlicek body was found up river, 5 miles to the east at Widnes on the 1st November. The squadron eventually left Speke for RAF Valley on Anglesey, on the 3rd March 1941.

Flight Lieutenant Denys Edgar Gillam D.S.O. D.F.C. A.F.C.

Denys Edgar Gillam was born in Tyneside in 1915. He obtained his flying licence in 1934 and joined the RAF the following year. In June 1938, Denys received the A.F.C. for flying food to the people of Rathlin Island in very hazardous conditions. During the Battle of Britain he served with No.616 Squadron very successfully with seven kills. At the end of the Battle he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and was posted to Duxford to assist in the forming of No.312 (Czech) Squadron.

In July 1941, he was given command of No.615 (Surrey) Squadron and awarded a Bar to the D.F.C. in October 1941. The following month Denys was shot down by flak and picked up by Air Sea Rescue Launch off Dunkirk. In December he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). March 1942, saw him forming the first Typhoon Wing at Duxford and subsequently taking command of 20 Sector 2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF) in April 1944. In August 1944 Denys was awarded the Bar to his DSO and in October of that year he led an attack on the German Staff Conference at Dordrecht, which killed many of the senior staff of the 15th Army.

Denys was awarded the second bar to his DSO in January 1945 and left the RAF later that year as a Group Captain. He joined No.616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force as a Flight Lieutenant when they reformed at RAF Finningley in 1947. He finally left in 1950 to join the family carpet business Homfray Carpets in Halifax where he became Chairman. He went on to be Deputy Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire and retired to become a gentleman farmer in his beloved Yorkshire. He died suddenly of a heart attack in 1991.



Flt. Lt. Denys Edgar Gillam

Pilot Officer Alois Vasatko

Alois Vasatko was born on the 25th August 1908 in Celakovice. Having been a teacher he started military service, which he finished in spring 1929, and eventually moved to the Army Academy. After qualifying as a Lieutenant of Artillery he was posted to the 54th Artillery Regiment in Bratislava. In October 1935 he was promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant and qualified as an Air Observer. Between 1937 & 1938 he trained as a pilot becoming operational on the 1st March 1939.

After the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, Vasatko with a group of friends crossed into Poland on the 13th July 1939. From there he moved to France. When WWII began, 'Amos' (nickname of Vasatko) was posted on the 11th September 1939 to fighter school at Chartres, training on Curtiss Hawk 75 aircraft, and on the 11th May 1940 joined the famous Groupe de Chasse I/5. On the 17th May he had his first successful air battle when he shared the shooting down of a Bf109 and took part in the shooting down of a Henschel Hs126. Then he was appointed as a flight commander. On the 12th June 1940, he took part in the destroying of twelve enemy planes three of which he shot down alone. During a dogfight in which he shot down a Heinkel He111 he was slightly wounded and on the 9th and 15th June he crash landings twice. He became the most successful Czechoslovak fighter pilot in the battle of France. At the end of June he flew together with his unit to North Africa and on the 5th August 1940, he arrived at Cardiff on board the 'David Livingstone'.

He moved via the Czech camp at Cholmodeley Park to the Czech depot at Cosford where he joined the RAFVR with the rank of Pilot Officer. On the 5th September he was posted to the newly created No.312 (Czech) Fighter Squadron as part of the first group of pilots. On the 12th December 1940 he was made the flight commander of 'B' Flight and on the 5th June 1941 he became its Commanding Officer. No.312 was part of Kenley Wing, they took part in the first offensive flights over occupied France, and on the 9th July, Vasatko probably shot down a Bf109 and damaged another.

In the spring of 1942, he helped with the organisation of the Czechoslovak Fighter Wing, which consisted of No's 310, 312 and 313 Squadron's. During an escort of Boston's over Cherbourg on the 3rd June he probably shot down an Fw190. Then came the fatal day, of the 23rd June 1942 when the Czech Wing escorted Boston's on a raid against an airfield in Morlaix. During their return near the coast of England, No.312 was attacked by a group of six Fw190 from above. Vasatko tried to manoeuvre to a better position for the fight but his Spitfire collided with an attacking aircraft. Both planes then crashed into sea.

Alois Vasatko had been awarded many Czechoslovak and Allied orders and medals. The Czechoslovak Order of the White Lion, the Czechoslovak War Cross 1939, French Legion d'honneur – Chevalier, French War Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) which he obtained on the day of his death. On the 7th March 1992, the President of Czechoslovak republic ordered Alois Vasatko to be promoted to the rank of Major General in memoriam.



Pilot Officer Alois Vasatko

Sergeant Josef Stehlik

Josef Stehlik was born on the 23rd March 1915, in Pikarec Czechoslovakia. He started pilot training at the Elementary Pilot School in Prague in 1936. He served as pilot and instructor with No.3 Air Regiment and was promoted to Sergeant. After the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, he crossed into Poland on the 5th June 1939 and then onto France.

After arriving in France he joined the Foreign Legion at the end of August 1939. When WWII began he was transferred to Chartres for retraining. On the 1st December 1939, he was posted to Groupe de Chasse III/3 and took part in the air battle of France. During this time Stehlik shot down four enemy aircraft and shared in the shooting down of four more. As the Germans advanced he flew to Africa and then sailed from Casablanca to England. On the 5th September 1940, as Sergeant he joined the newly formed No.312 (Czech) Squadron at Duxford.

After the squadron victory on 8th October, he claimed a probable Bf109 shot down and another damaged plus another Ju88 shared. He left operational duty in October 1941, and became an instructor training pilots at Hullavington and then in Canada. In April 1943 he returned to No.312 Squadron where he flew many operations over occupied Europe. In January 1944 he moved to the Soviet Union together with a group of 20 Czech pilots. After training on Soviet La-5 fighters, he was posted in September 1944 to Slovakia as commander of the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment. He added to his score one Ju88 and a share of a Ju87. He destroyed two more aircraft on the ground, five trucks, a locomotive, and three other vehicles. Following this he was then involved with the forming of 1st Czechoslovak Air Division where he was promoted to second in command of the 2nd Fighter Regiment. He was awarded the Czechoslovak War Cross 1939, Czechoslovak Medal for Bravery, and the French War Cross.

In post-war life Captain Stehlik took part in the creating of the new Czechoslovak Air Force. At first he was the commander of a retraining course on Bf109G aircraft and at the end of 1945 the commander of a course of instructors for the Army Air Academy. In 1948 when he was discharged from the army he was arrested for a reason, which was not too clear, but after a year as there were no evidence against him, he was acquitted. In 1964 he was finally rehabilitated and got back his rank and returned to the army. He eventually retired as a Colonel in the Air Force, and died suddenly on the 30th May 1991.



Sergeant Josef Stehlik

No.312 SQUADRON AIRCRAFT

Yellow 1 flown by Flight Lieutenant Gillam was a Hawker Hurricane Mk.I serial number P2575 coded DU-P. During the engagement on the 8th October, Gillam fired 2,400 rounds, and his aircraft's windscreen was damaged by return fire from the Ju88. Later this aircraft was flown by various training units and was eventually struck off charge on 23rd May 1944.



Yellow 1 in the background & yellow 2 in the foreground

Yellow 2 flown by Pilot Officer Vasatko was a Hawker Hurricane Mk.I serial number L1926 coded DU-J. During the engagement on the 8th October, Vasatko fired 144 rounds. The aircraft's exhaust manifold was damaged by return fire from the Ju88. Later this aircraft was transferred to No.55 Operation Training Unit (OTU) and crashed on landing at Usworth on 15th April 1941.

Yellow 3 flown by Sergeant Stehlik was a Hawker Hurricane Mk.1 serial number L1807. During the engagement on the 8th October, Stehlik fired 504 rounds and his aircraft's fuel tank was damaged by return fire from the Ju88. Later this aircraft also went to No.55 Operation Training Unit (OTU) and crashed on 8th March 1941 at Usworth.

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