

## Letter written by Len Perry

In response to ones wart stories in the local paper I wondered if this will be a contribution, I have never put my memories on paper before and to talk of them I find uncomfortable but I do realize it is important for history.

It was on the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1940 a blue sky with puffs of white cloud, I was cycling home to Deptford from Bexley Kent in company with four friends ; we had been swimming in Danson Park. A very heavy air raid was in progress in fact planes were passing over us in groups of fifty or more, the whole sky was trembling like a giant thunder storm, it seemed indeed a air armada, it just had to be stared at, a magnificent sight, exciting to us teenagers. During the past winter in the black outs we would gather in each others houses and study aircraft recognition so we knew the German planes and could pick out the bombers by name (records since show there were some 600 planes in the air).

It must have been between four or five in the afternoon, and already there were blood red reflections on the buildings as we crested the top of Shooters hill and from there it seemed the whole of the Thames basin and docks were ablaze, and for the first time we felt fear when we realised our home could be amongst it.

While gazing at some at this awesome sight we saw a fighter come tumbling out of the sky and two thirds of the way down a piece broke away from it and fell to the ground, as far as we could ascertain from where we were standing it fell into the Thames, we were surprised because there had been no air combat that we noticed, but we were fairly sure it was a Spitfire.

We cycled on towards home across Blackheath, and there to our amazement was the wreckage of the plane we had seen come down twenty minutes ago and already a rope was around it and a policeman standing by who promptly told us to beat it, so we grabbed a bit for souvenir and ran off, next morning we visited the site with other friends to show them the plane, but everything had gone and the site was clear. Over the years since, from time to time I have mentioned to local people of the plane that come down on Blackheath during the war and there seemed to be record in fact some denied it, I also went to a exhibition put on at Greenwich baths called Greenwich at war and there was no mention of the plane crash.

About 10 years ago I visited my son in Portsmouth and took my granddaughter to nearby Tangmere airfield museum and I mention to a steward I witnessed a spitfire come down on Blackheath he said I think the curator would like to see you, he appeared, smiled and said you did not see a spitfire come down I thought hear we go again but he was able to tell me the plane I saw come down was Hurricane and was piloted by FL LT RC Reynell a Australian who took off that afternoon from this airfield we think it was midair collision and he ask me many questions how the plane descended, the pilot bailed out but his shoot failed to open, so was that which I saw break away from the plane him? He went on to say he fell in the grounds of Grayladies Convent and the plane came down on Point Hill but I was able to tell him it was more across the A2 near the Territorial Barracks.

They told me where he was buried in Brookwood cemetery Surrey, and the last twist in the story is I go to Brookwood each year to a service at the Russian Memorial as later in the war I served in the Navy on the Russian Convoys so I was able to visit his grave.

I found it very moving but satisfying.

Kind Regards,

Len Perry

PS the reason Greenwich had no record of the crash is that part of Blackheath is in Lewisham.