

PERSONAL STORIES OF THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Pilot Officer David Crook, RAF 609 Squadron:

“Some Hurricanes were already attacking the Messerschmitts and the latter had formed their usual defensive circle, going round and round on each other’s tails. This makes attack rather difficult as if you attack one there is always another behind you...we came down right on top of the enemy formation, going at terrific speed, and as we approached them, we split up slightly, each pilot selecting his own target. I saw an ME 110 ahead of me going in front. I fired a good burst at practically point-blank range. Some black smoke poured from his port engine and he turned to the right and stalled. I could not see what happened after this as I narrowly missed hitting his port wing. It flashed past so close that I instinctively ducked my head.”

Hauptmann Hans Kogler, Staffel Kapitaen 1/ZG 26:

“Somewhere west of Ipswich/Harwich, still without the fighter-bombers, we were attacked by Spitfires...suddenly, I was attacked from behind by a Spitfire and was hit in both engines...I was forced to ditch...I lost consciousness and when I awoke, found the cockpit full of water and so I had to get out before I was dragged down...we both swam to it (the dinghy) and got in. What followed was a hard time for both of us because we had nothing to eat or drink for four days...the dinghy was capsized that night by a wave...we were picked up (on 14 August)...by that time we were the best in our Geschwader at dinghy sailing!”

Mr. M. E. Vane, British Civilian:

“On 13 August 1940 I was haymaking at Manor Farm Chilworth. We had not heard any warning and did not know that there was an air raid on until we heard machine-gun fire overhead...by this time the farmer had stopped his tractor and we all took cover as best we could underneath the hayrick being built...after

what seemed like an extra-long burst of machine-gun fire, there was the scream of racing engines which made us look up at the low cloud wondering what was to emerge. After what seemed like a lifetime but was in fact only a minute or less, a burning plane fell through the clouds to the earth, its wings appeared to be folded back along the fuselage.”

Oberleutnant Hans-Ulrich Kettling:

“...This time they got the left engine...I decided to bring the plane in for a belly landing. Finally, it crashed through a low stone wall which was hidden by a hedge, leaving the rear fuselage behind which broke just behind the cockpit. Looking back I saw the rubber dinghy, which was stowed in a partition under the fuselage and fixed with a long cable to the side of the cockpit, dangling behind along the meadow, inflating itself and following like a dog – a very grotesque sight. I jumped out, freed Volk, and carried him to a safe distance fearing fire and explosion. After that, a lot of people (heaven knows where they came from) came running with armed with stick and stones, threatening and shouting from a distance until some red-capped Military Police took over. A doctor came and took care of Volk...and he took care of my burned hand too. We got an excellent dinner, with the compliments and wishes from the local military big shot. Several RAF officers came and asked questions and I think one of them was the pilot who shot me down.”

Richard Hambidge, British Civilian:

“My mother and I were in our air-raid shelter in the back garden – we had been there for much of the day because it was quite hectic at that time. We were sitting and talking when all of a sudden ‘zoom’ – it was so low, we never heard in coming...our local air raid warden came into the garden and told us it was a Messerschmitt that had just gone over and it had crashed out in the cornfields...I was so surprised how close to home it had crashed and that it had caught one of its wings on the many concrete posts which had been put into open fields to hinder German gliders if they ever invaded us. The pilot must have been very lucky.”

Pilot Officer Jan Zurakowski:

“...My Spitfire turned slowly, stalled and ended in a flat spin. I had to bail out. I was not sure which way I should jump – inside or outside the spin...I was descending faster than the aircraft and the Spitfire was spinning above my head and I was afraid to pull the ripcord. Looking down, I realized that the ground was approaching fast and when I could distinguish a man with a gun, I pulled the ripcord. I landed close to this chap with a gun. The old man (from the Home Guard) with a double-barreled shotgun was shaken badly by the aircraft and a man dropping from the sky. I was not speaking English well so I was trying to show him my RAF identity card but his hands were shaking so much, he could not take it. A short time later, a British Army officer arrived and he cleared up the situation.”

Oberfeldwebel Artur Dau, 7/JG 51:

“I shall certainly remember 28 August 1940 if should ever live to be 100! That day my Staffel was on a Freie Jagd over the Channel and southern England. Suddenly, I had two Hurricanes in my sights, and with my Rottenfleiger, attacked them. I had opened fire on the second aircraft when I was hit by flak over Dover and had to bail out. After landing, I was taken into custody by Coastguards and then a Bobby arrived and took down my particulars. Shortly afterwards an RAF officer with a bandaged head appeared in my cell. We shook hands and he asked me if I had been the pilot of a Bf109 that had crashed near Folkestone. I said I was and he pointed to his head, and said “You did that!” I answered him, “I am sorry”; then he left. Some hours later I was driven to London and interrogated. That was the end of me as a pilot.”