

## Battle of Britain over Selmeston



John

Nash, Battle of Britain. By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

The year 2015 marks the 75th centenary of the Battle of Britain, officially recognised in modern history as taking place from July 10 until October 31, 1940, a battle fought entirely in the skies and mainly over the southern half of the United Kingdom.

Selmeston had a small claim to fame during this period of great air battles, when on Monday August 12, 1940, a Messerschmitt BF 109E-1, having been badly damaged in combat with the RAF, over Kent and Sussex, finally crashed into a field of corn stacks on Mays Farm, Selmeston.

In aviation circles, this site of a damaged Luftwaffe aircraft is known as 'the Red Devil crash', because a red devil motif was found painted on the port side cowling of the aircraft when it finally came to rest in the field.

Unusually, the aircraft was fitted with a rear-view mirror fitted to its windscreen framing. That fixture apparently didn't help the pilot, Unteroffizier Zaunbrecher, to see the British Hurricane behind him, flown by Pilot Officer John McLintock of 615 Squadron, who shot him down in a hail of .303 bullets, forcing Zaunbrecher to crash-land in Selmeston and to be taken prisoner of war by the Home Guard.



Red 14 with police and soldiers guarding it, at Mays Farm Selveston. Stonery Farm can be seen in the background.



Selveston residents flock to the crash site in Selveston



*Service personnel from 49 Maintenance Unit at RAF Faygate examine the red devil motif*



*Corporal Robert Anson pretends to remove the emblem – a posed photograph*



*RAF and Army officers examine the aircraft. Note the bullet holes on the black cross and the number 14.*



The pilot of The Red Devil – Leo Zaunbrecher with his mechanic on the right.



Pilot Officer John McClintock 615 Squadron

Because of its fame, Messerschmitt Red 14 went on a countrywide tour of the UK. In the photograph below, it is in Leeds city centre, guarded by the police against souvenir hunters. Note that the wings have been hurriedly positioned back to front.



A chalk and watercolour study entitled *Encounter in the Afternoon* (1940) by the official war artist Paul Nash depicts the now famous Selmeston Red Devil, with the devil motif visible on the cowling of the aircraft. The artist has employed 'artistic licence' to bring Mount Caburn closer to the foreground. The painting closely resembles the photograph below.



Image courtesy of Manchester City Art Gallery

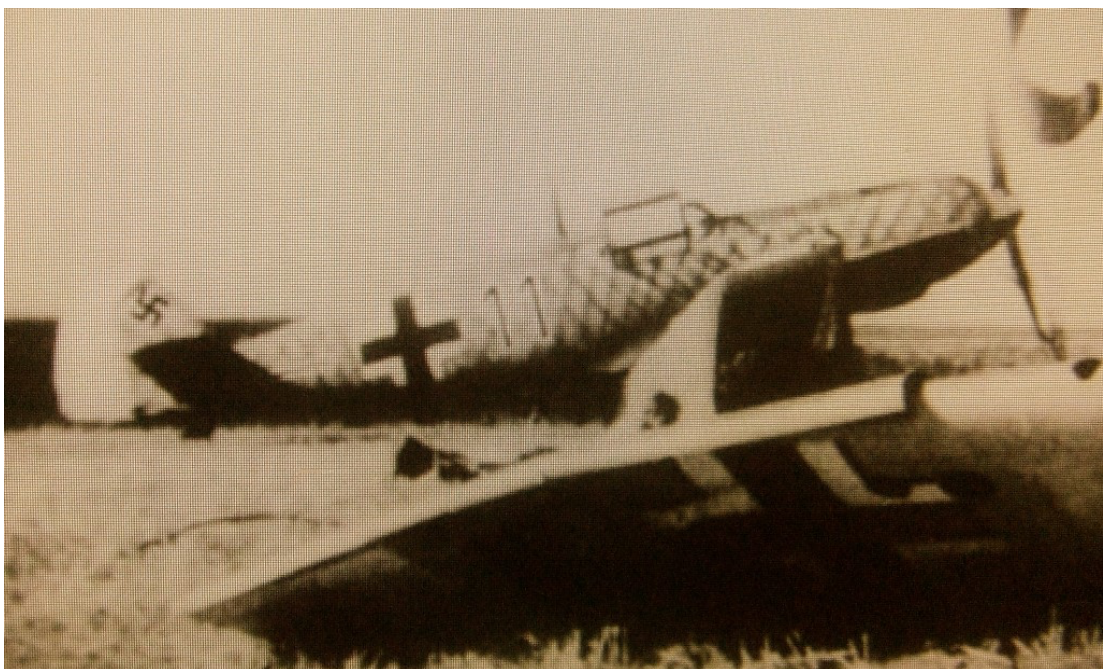


A summer's day in a Sussex field, 1940

Rather strangely, an event similar event to the Red Devil crash occurred again within a few weeks in Selmeston. This time, the downed Messerschmitt 109 came to rest at Lower Mays Farm, on September 27, 1940.

On this day as early as 6am the Luftwaffe bombers were taking off from France heading for London with Messerschmitt 109 fighters (Me 109) protecting them. By 8.15 am the Chain High radar stations were reporting fast raiders on a fifty-mile front crossing between Dover and Brighton. The RAF fighters were ordered up to engage the enemy, who didn't seem to have any specific targets to bomb, and remained over the area for about an hour, which was unusual. Their object was to exhaust the ammunition and fuel of the attacking Spitfires and Hurricanes in order that a subsequent heavier raid could make their way to London unhindered.

Gefrieter ( Aircraftman 1) Hans-Dieter John was the 21-year-old pilot of Black 11 a Me 109 (3369) from 5 JG/27, acting as one of these protective Me 109's.



*Black 11 at its base in France. Note the 'hatching' type camouflage.*

The German pilot's luck ran out over Lewes when one of the anti-aircraft gun emplacements managed to hit the radiator of his aircraft with one of their shells. By this time his aircraft was on fire over Selmeston and he decided to use his parachute, landing in the fields of Lower Mays Farm. His Messerschmitt smashed into the ground some 250 yards away, a complete write-off (no triumphant tour around the UK for this one!). He was quickly captured (probably by the same home guard who were involved with the Red Devil crash) and made a prisoner of war.

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