

## Christchurch's Battle of Britain Hurricanes

The Hawker Hurricane was the first monoplane 8 gun fighter aircraft to enter service with the RAF. It flew and entered service before the Spitfire and in the Battle of Britain there were many more Hurricane squadrons than Spitfire squadrons.

### Christchurch Airfield

Before the war started Christchurch airfield had been a small but busy airport, light aviation centre and flying school. When the war started it was taken over by the RAF. Airspeed opened a shadow factory, building the Airspeed Oxford training and communications aircraft. In 1940 the airfield was still quite small, with reinforced grass runways.

### The Station Defence flight

Christchurch airfield, like many others, had a small number of fighter aircraft provided as a local or station defence flight. These flights were not part of the main fighter defences but would be scrambled to protect the airfield. The pilots would be present at Christchurch on other duties, flying training, communications etc., but any who were qualified fighter pilots could be on standby to fly the station defence flight aircraft. Each of the three Christchurch Hurricanes were typical of aircraft passed down to second line units, often having been previously damaged and repaired. In reality the Christchurch flight seems only to have flown one Hurricane at any one time. In practical terms only one or two pilots flew the old Hurricanes and they often flew alone; one pilot and one plane airborne to defend the airfield against potentially dozens of enemy aircraft.

### The Special Duty Flight

Even before the war the RAF had formed a special flight to support radar development work. By the summer of 1940 this renamed Special Duty Flight had arrived at Christchurch from St Athan to support both the Telecommunications Research Establishment at Worth Matravers but also the Air Defence Experimental Establishment at Christchurch. It was reinforced, by absorbing H Flight of No 1 Anti Aircraft Co-operation Unit and later a calibration flight at which point it was renamed the Telecommunications Flying Unit. The flight was involved in many aspects of radar development including airborne interception radar for night fighters and air to surface radar for coastal command. It had a large fleet of aircraft that changed with the tasks undertaken, the majority being large to medium twin engined aircraft like the Wellington, Blenheim and Anson.

### Operations

In the summer of 1940, RAF Christchurch's three Hawker Hurricanes were flown by RAF pilots from the Special Duty Flight, the Air Ministry's secret radar and signals flight trials unit also located at Christchurch. The pilots included Squadron Leader P. E. Meagher and Flying Officer D. L. Rayment. On several occasions these two pilots engaged enemy fighters and bombers, damaging several and each pilot shot down at least one bomber. Amazingly one of these Hurricanes survived and is the aircraft on display at the Science Museum in London, Hawker Hurricane Mk.I. L1592. This particular machine had previously fought with the RAF's 615 (County of Surrey) Squadron over Dunkirk and in the Battle of Britain even before it was sent to Christchurch to fight again after combat damage repairs had been completed.

**16/8/1940.** 13:30 hours. Enemy aircraft overhead. Hurricane (L1552?) took off on patrol but failed to make contact.

**18/8/1940** Hurricane in action with ME 109s and 110s.

37536 F/Officer Rayment unhurt but longeron and starboard mainplane damaged by bullets.

2/9/1940 11:30 hrs. Hurricane L1562 took off.

34072 S/Ldr P E Meacher observed Dornier 215 out at sea, made contact and shot enemy aircraft down into sea about 10 miles S W of Needles.

19/9/1940 Hurricane L1562 F/Lt D L Rayment in successful combat with JU 88 which crashed into the sea south of St Catherine's point. Hurricane damaged by enemy action.

25/9/1940 Hurricane L1562 taken to No 50 Maintenance Unit.

13/10/1940 Air raid alarm sounded. Hurricane L1592, airborne at 16:05 hrs pilot F/Lt D L Rayment. No enemy aircraft encountered, returned to base 16.45 hours.

15/10/1940. 12.15hrs. Hurricane L1592 airborne at 12:20 encountered approximately 24 ME 109s at 12,000 feet one of which detached to attack. No combat. Returned to base 12:35 hrs.

19/10/1940 11:30 hrs Hurricane L1592 F/Lt D L Rayment, airborne climbed to 12,000 feet. No enemy aircraft encountered.

10/11/1940 14:40 hours Hurricane L1592 F/Lt Rayment encountered approximately 20 enemy aircraft at 30,000 feet. Intercepted enemy aircraft thought to be Dornier 215. Fired one burst at 700 yards no effect observed landed 15:15.

1/7/1941 London Gazette includes award of Air Force Cross to F/Lt D L Rayment, Flight Commander of Special Duty Flight.

information from **Christchurch Airfield 1926 – 1966 40 Years of Flying** by the late Allen White reprinted and published by Christchurch Local History Society

If you want to know more about the history of Christchurch Airfield we recommend David Fagan's free ebook which you can download by clicking on

[History of Christchurch Aerodrome](#)

and

[History of Christchurch Aerodrome vol 2](#)