

NOTES ON ONLY WORLD WAR 2 BURIAL IN BLETSGOE – Sergeant A E Pilfold (Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone in graveyard extension)

I found this man wandering around the churchyard apparently stalking David but actually wanting to get inside the church which has always been locked when he visited the war grave in the past. Then I said I thought Ernest Pilfold was killed on take-off from Thurleigh and he said no, not at all so he's sent over this info which I don't think is anywhere else?

Mike Gibbons

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Begin forwarded message:

From: Geoffrey Fairhurst <Geoffrey.Fairhurst@BTOpenworld.com>

Subject: Re: Bletsoe: Ernest Alfred Pilfold

Date: 19 January 2018 19:51:21 GMT

To: Mike Gibbons <mike.gibbons@bletsoe.net>

Mike

It was fortunate meeting up with you today. The following account appears on the **Aircrew Remembrance Society** website and is a graphic account of Sgt Pilfold's untimely demise: _

Mission: Dog-fighting Exercise.

Date: 30th April 1941

Time: (Exact time not known).

Unit: No. 245 Squadron R.A.F.

Type: Hawker Hurricane I

Serial No.W9239

Coded: DX -

Location: Dived into Lough Neagh, Ireland.

Pilot: Sergeant. Alfred Ernest Pilfold. 1151343 Age. 28 – Killed.

REASON FOR LOSS:

Hurricanes W9201 and W9239 collided mid air and crashed into the Lough Killing P/O Perrot and Sgt Pilfold. Aircraft were with No.245 Squadron at Aldergrove.

At 18.50 P/O Perrott and Sgt Pitfold took off for a dogfighting exercise.

Having failed to return within the normal endurance time of their aircraft it became evident that they had forced landed or crashed. Reports later received through operations showed that a fatal collision had occurred in the air and both aircraft dived into Lough Neagh. The body of Sgt Pilford was recovered, but was necessary to report P/O Perrott missing – believed killed.

Account from S/L Simpson who flew over the crash site. (from his private letters).

"What hell this is". Two of my boys were killed yesterday. I had sent them off to do air firing practise over Lough Neagh. It is just a normal affair and I did not think any more about it. Late in the afternoon, Chipper said he wondered what had happened to them. They were fifteen minutes late. I had just come back after flying over Lough Erne.

I did not want to worry about the boys at first, I thought that they were just being young and were flying around enjoying themselves. Then I realized so much time had past they no longer have any petrol. A watchman on a boat in the Lough had landed and telephoned to say that he thought he saw an aircraft crash into the water about twenty minutes before. Someone else who lived near the Lough rang up and said they had just been told that two aircraft had fallen into the water. These horrible reports meant one thing to me. They had obviously collided.

Chipper and I ran out to our aircraft and flew over the Lough, it was late and light was failing. We searched the surface of the water, I found one patch of oil and Chipper found the other. There were little pieces of floating wreckage, it was quite horrible. I have never overcome my horrors of losing youngsters when they are not in battle, it seems so wasteful, so wasteful after their training. Chipper told me by R/T that he had found a patch of oil and that he could see some fishermen lifting a body onto a boat.

Two eye witness accounts whom discovered the pilot's bodies and recovered them from the Lough;

Peter Kelly and a few other fishermen were out on the Lough in boats and recovered one of the bodies. His name was Sgt Pilford, he was still alive when they got him in the boat, it was then discovered that the fingers were missing off his left hand. It was presumed that the pilot's fingers were lost in the collision. On returning to the battery harbour the police were present accompanied by Dr. Brown, who pronounced the Sgt dead by drowning.

ABOVE TAKEN FROM THE "AIRCREW REMEMBRANCE SOCIETY" WEBSITE

The Pilfolds married at All Saints in Milton Ernest on 23 November 1940. He gave his address as Bexley, Kent she (Ailsa Kimber) gave Milton Ernest. It is not clear why Pilfold was buried in Bletsoe. There is a record of a three years old Ailsa arriving at Plymouth from South Africa with her parents so one assumes she was born in S Africa. His parents lived in Bexley. She eventually went to Jersey and re-married. She died there in 1977.

My own assumption is that at the time of his death she was renting accommodation in the area awaiting his return from the training mission in N Ireland. When his remains were returned to her perhaps Bletsoe church was her nearest? One does feel that there is a story to be unearthed!

Hope this is helpful. We will watch out for great progress in restoring the Chancel.
Kind regards

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On 19/01/2018 12:30, Mike Gibbons wrote:
Thanks for any further information.
Pleased we met!
Best wishes
Mike Gibbons