

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

WING COMMANDER ALEXANDER "NOEL" CONSTANTINE

One of "The Few", Fighter 'Ace', Air Fighter Tactician and WWII Survivor.

AND

THE BOULTON PAUL DEFIANT

Two Almost Forgotten Heroes of WWII.



*Wing Commander
Alexander "Noel" Constantine*

On a recent visit to the Hunt Field airstrip, situated alongside the Onkaparinga River at Seaford Meadows, South Australia, I had a fascinating chat with SA aviator, Geoff Constantine, who still flies his 1957 Cessna 180, VH-CXA, which he has owned now for about 47 years. Geoff had a long career as an Ag pilot, working in Australia and overseas.

The conversation moved to talking about Geoff's "Uncle Noel" who he said flew Boulton Paul Defiants with RAF No. 141 Squadron during the Battle of Britain. Geoff Constantine still had his uncle's two RAF logbooks, which he kindly loaned to us for scanning, thereby allowing copies to be retained by the South Australian Aviation Museum. The logbooks contain a wealth of information for researchers, detailing Noel Constantine's RAF flying career, between his first training flight on 17 May 1938 and his last recorded flight with the RAF, at the rank of Wing Commander, on 9 November 1945, which was approximately two months after the official Victory over Japan Day (V-J Day) on 15 August 1945.

During Noel Constantine's RAF service, he flew 41 different types of aircraft, including Ansons, Blenheims, Battles, Defiants, Havocs, Beaufighters, Hudsons, Catalinas, Thunderbolts, Mosquitos, Hurricanes and most of the Spitfire variants up to XIV. Aircraft flown even included two Japanese transport aircraft, namely a Mitsubishi Ki-57 "Topsy" and a Tachikawa Ki-54 "Hickory." His logbook shows these Japanese aircraft were flown by Noel Constantine, about 5-6 weeks after V-J Day, both with Japanese crews.

Alexander "Noel" Constantine was born in 1914, in Moama, on the River Murray, New South Wales. Noel's parents, Alexander and Victoria Constantine, had moved to NSW from New Zealand, where Noel's grandparents had settled in 1865, after emigrating from Greece. Noel was educated at Albury High School and later lived with his widowed mother at Cowes on Phillip Island, Victoria. After studying pharmacy at Melbourne University, Noel travelled to London in 1937, where in 1938, at the age of 24, he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) on a short service commission. In some sources, there appears to be a misunderstanding about whether Noel's Australian origin also involved service with the RAAF, but he actually only served with the RAF.

Pilot training for Noel commenced at No.9 E & RFTS, Walsgrave, Coventry on 17 May 1938, in an Avro Cadet biplane. His first solo, in the same type of aircraft, was on 9 June 1938, after approximately 12.5 hours dual flying. In July 1938, now with a total of approximately 60 hours, the Chief Flying Instructor assessed Noel's proficiency as a pilot as "Average."

On 24 July 1938, Noel Constantine was posted to No.8 FTS at RAF Montrose in Scotland, where he commenced training on Hawker Hart and Hawker Audax biplanes. He was signed off as having "Average" proficiency and was posted to No.1 AOS (Air Observer's School) at RAF North Coates, Lincolnshire, commencing on 5 March 1939. At No.1 AOS, Noel underwent bombing training on Westland Wallace biplanes and he was trained to perform reconnaissance, navigation and photography in Avro Ansons.

Noel's first Squadron posting was to No. 141 Squadron at Grangemouth on 4 December 1939. No. 141 Squadron had reformed on 4 October 1939 at RAF Turnhouse in Scotland. (RAF Turnhouse later became Edinburgh Airport). Initially equipped with Gloucester Gladiators and then Bristol Blenheims, in April 1940, these aircraft were replaced with Boulton Paul Defiant Mk. I turret fighters. Noel Constantine's logbook showed his first "experience on type" i.e. on the Defiant, was on 13 May 1940.

BOULTON PAUL DEFIANT



By way of background, between the two World Wars, 1st Viscount Hugh Montague Trenchard, described as the "Father of the Royal Air Force", was seen as one of the early advocates of "strategic bombing". He believed the bomber to be the key aircraft of a modern air force and air defence to be largely pointless. In a speech he gave in 1926, Trenchard stated, "The airplane is the most offensive weapon that has ever been invented. It is a shockingly bad weapon of defence.... Although it is necessary to have some defence to keep up the morale of your own people, it is infinitely more necessary to lower the morale of the people against you by attacking them."

In 1932, when addressing the House of Commons, then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin reinforced this doctrine by saying, "I think it is well also for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through. The only defence is offence, which means you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves." He went on to say that in the next war, the aeroplane would "wipe out European civilisation."

In the run-up to WWII, the British Air Ministry, instead of looking to redesign new fighter aircraft, were more focused on a concept of fleets of bombers, each passing each other in the sky on the way to bomb their enemies' homes. The British appeared content to continue with the use of and

development of biplanes, while the Germans had already equipped themselves with twin-engined monoplane bombers that were faster and more heavily armed than the RAF biplane fighters of the day. With the Germans rebuilding and rearming, the unpreparedness of the British did not bode well for a looming air war.

In 1923, the British Government had created a post on the Air Council for the “supply and research” of the RAF. This was seen as a “backwater” where the Air Ministry could move senior air officers who had served their time and apparent usefulness. This role was given to Hugh Dowding in 1930. Later that year, in the summer of 1930, Dowding was asked to take part in an air exercise in which bombers were to attack Britain. Dowding, who commanded the fighter defence, deployed his fighters in standing patrols, and assisted by a rudimentary early warning system, was successful in intercepting every raid that was launched against him during the simulated exercise. While he appeared to have demonstrated that the bomber did not always get through, the umpires overcompensated for the firepower of the bombers and downgraded the fighter hits on the attacking force. As a result, it was ruled that Dowding’s fighter group had suffered “unsustainable losses” and victory was awarded to the bombers. Regardless of the perceived outcome of the exercise, Dowding continued to dedicate himself to creating a home defence capable of defending Britain against any bomber threat.

A paper called “Bright Ideas Fighters”, written by Wing Commander Arthur Maund in late 1931, stated the view that single seat-fighters would not be able to tackle large formations of “super-bombers” and proposed a new kind of fighter that would be capable of breaking up bomber formations before they reached their target. Maund argued it would require a large number of fighters capable of directing unified and coordinated fire into the belly of enemy bombers. Maund further argued that the pilot had to be free to manoeuvre his aircraft without concerning himself with the operation of the machine guns. In 1933, this was taken up by Geoffrey Salmond, who at the time was the Commander-in-Chief of Britain’s air defence. He called for an aircraft equipped with similar ‘free guns’, as used by biplanes in WWI. It was envisaged that squadrons of these fighters would be able to approach a fleet of enemy bombers, from below or from one side, and coordinate their fire.

Senior Air Ministry officers responsible for developing this new breed of “bomber destroyers” to meet the threat of enemy bombers, had done most of their flying during WWI and the continued use of two-seater biplanes, which continued to be the aircraft used by RAF fighter squadrons throughout most of the 1930s, appeared adequate to them.

The first of the “bomber destroyers” to be developed was the Hawker Demon but the Air Ministry was not completely satisfied, requiring a turret to be fitted to the rear seat to protect the gunner from return fire, while also providing a stable platform from which to operate the guns. In trials, the first manually operated turrets were found to be too heavy and cumbersome for the gunner to move during flight. The answer was found in a newly developed turret that was hydraulically operated.

The company chosen to build the powered turret Hawker Demons was Boulton Paul at Norwich. In 1935, they purchased two experimental and revolutionary electric hydraulic turrets, designed by the French company Société d’Application des Machines Matrix (SAMM). The experimental turrets were especially designed for English guns and incorporated improvements identified by Boulton Paul’s Chief Engineer, John Dudley North. The purchase contract gave Boulton Paul an extended option to acquire the British Empire rights for the turrets. At the time, North prepared a general design for the Boulton Paul Defiant, which was to be developed as a private venture, with some assistance from Rolls-Royce. The Air Ministry was now confident that with the purchase of the French turret, they now possessed the means to equip a fighter capable of delivering the necessary and overwhelming firepower to defeat the threat posed by the German long-range strategic super-bomber program.

In 1936, following a decision to divide the RAF into Bomber and Fighter Commands, with the Bomber Command seen as far more prestigious, Dowding was given the job of heading Fighter Command. Intelligence reports at the time about a German super-bomber program speculated an 84-foot-long bomber with a 114-foot wingspan, carrying a 10-man crew, including five gunners. However, following the death of the German strategic super-bomber mastermind, Walther Wever, in a 1936 flying accident, the super-bomber program appeared to die with him. Wever's successor, Kesselring, who favoured medium bombers, appeared to drop the super-bomber project, switching his focus to developing the JU 87 Stuka dive bomber and the Me 109, a fast and agile fighter.

The British appeared completely unaware of Germany's change in direction and accordingly had placed more urgency on the development of a modern fighter capable of taking on the anticipated fleets of German super-bombers. In their apparent rush to commission a new bomber destroyer, senior Air Staff members appeared to convince themselves that the new fighter would not need any forward-firing machine guns. At the time, it was believed the enemy would have to fly from Germany and be without fighter escorts, leaving the new British bomber-destroyer with the sole objective of shooting down heavily gunned super-bombers. Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, Christopher Courtney, saw no reason for fitting the aircraft with downward-firing or forward-firing guns, because a fighter attacking the vulnerable underbelly of an enemy bomber only needed upward-fire. Courtney's boss, Ellington agreed, and in April 1935, he approved Air Staff requirement F.9/35, a full specification setting out the precise requirements for the new 'free-gun' fighter. The two vital stipulations were that the fighter must have a "battery of guns amidships" and be able to fly 20 mph faster than the fastest bomber of the day.

Invitations were sent to every aeronautical company in the country, including Supermarine and Hawker. North from Boulton Paul used unofficial channels to approach the Air Ministry about his design and was told, that to be sure of securing the commission, he may wish to offer a forward firing capability. As a result, North ordered his designers to incorporate a fixed forward firing position for the turret, where the guns could be operated by the pilot pressing a button in the cockpit. Unfortunately, Boulton Paul did not get around to synchronising the forward-firing of the turret with the engine, so that if the pilot ever had cause to fire the turret guns in this manner, he would shoot off his own propellers. No-one at the Air Ministry appeared to have challenged this apparent fatal flaw. As a work around, the guns had to be raised to 22 degrees above the horizontal for the lower Browning machine guns to clear the propellor arc. While the pilot had a gun button on his spade grip, a master switch in the turret had to be set to 'pilot' for the pilot to be able to fire them.

1938 saw the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (Sholto Douglas) and Deputy Director of Home Operations (Donald Stevenson) apparently so convinced with the virtues of the turret fighter, they insisted one third of Home defence fighter squadrons be equipped with Defiants. Donaldson was even prepared to argue for Defiants over Spitfires and Hurricanes. As a result, the Boulton Paul Defiant became the third modern fighter alongside the Supermarine Spitfire and Hawker Hurricane.

The procurement of the Defiant had largely been carried out behind Dowding's back, adding to his suspicion that he was being frozen out of key decisions being made. Having already ordered 450 Defiants, virtually off the drawing board, Sholto Douglas did not appear open to further discussion. By June 1940, additional orders for Defiants raised the total ordered to 650. Dowding continued to resist the proposed use of Defiants in such large numbers.

On 8 December 1939, No. 264 Squadron was re-formed at RAF Station Martlesham Heath, to bring the Boulton Paul Defiant fighter into service, and operations began in March 1940, when the Squadron started convoy patrols. There were reports of the Defiant outline being initially mistaken for a Hurricane and attacks from the rear by German fighters being met with overwhelming fire from the

four Browning equipped .303 machine gun rear turret. However, after initial successes with the Defiant, including defending the withdrawal of British troops from Dunkirk, from examination of captured or crashed Defiants, the Luftwaffe soon realised the Defiant was vulnerable to frontal attacks. After beginning to take heavy losses of aircraft and crew, the No. 264 Defiants were withdrawn from day-fighter operations at the end of May 1940 and pilots began training for a night-fighter role. While recalled for a day fighting role during the height of the Battle of Britain, No.264 Squadron Defiants again suffered losses and returned to night-fighter operations.

THE “SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS” - 19 July 1940.

At the time of talking to Geoff Constantine, I had no idea that an entry in Noel Constantine’s logbook, would apparently lead to solving a mystery surrounding an ill-fated operation by No. 141 Squadron’s Boulton Paul Defiants on 19 July 1940. On that day, No. 141 Squadron suffered the greatest loss of life and aircraft in a single combat during the Battle of Britain. This incident became known as “The Slaughter of the Innocents.”

No. 141 Squadron was the second squadron to be equipped with Mk 1 Boulton Paul Defiants. By the end of June 1940, Noel Constantine had a total of 11 hours and 45 minutes in Defiants. These hours were all accrued with squadron training in the relative safety of Scotland and his first operational convoy escort patrol was on 6 July 1940, only days before the Battle of Britain commenced on 10 July 1940.

No. 141 Squadron moved from Scotland to RAF West Malling in Kent on 12 July 1940. On 19 July 1940, No. 141 Squadron’s 12 Defiants flew from their base at West Malling, to operate from RAF Hawkinge, located 2.2 miles north of Folkestone and 7.1 miles west of Dover. Hawkinge had been used during the early fighting in France and allowed maximum range for operations over France, including the Dunkirk evacuation. However, being only about three miles from the coast made climbing aircraft particularly vulnerable to prowling German fighters.

The 12 Defiants arrived at Hawkinge at about 10 a.m. and were joined at the airfield by No. 111 Squadron Hurricanes which had flown in from Croydon earlier the same morning. The No.111 Squadron pilots knew Defiants well, having previously flown joint missions with No. 264 Squadron.

Shortly before 12:30 p.m., Biggin Hill received reports of German raiders attacking shipping in the Channel. While the No. 111 Squadron Hurricanes were ready and their pilots were seasoned, having already seen action in the Battle of France and over Dunkirk, when the phone rang in the Hawkinge operations room, it was the Defiant Squadron, virtually none of whose pilots had experienced combat, who were ordered to scramble.

Nine of the 12 Defiants started successfully, two of the others spluttered and another failed to start at all. Consequently, only nine of the 12 Defiants, flying in three ‘vic’ sections, left Hawkinge at about 12:35 p.m., with orders to sweep Cape Gris Nez, about 20 miles south of Folkestone, at 5,000 feet.

Shortly before the Defiants left Hawkinge, two Staffels of Me109s, of III/JG 51 had left their airfields at Wissant in Northern France. Commanded by Hauptmann Hannes Trautloft, the 20 to 25 Me 109s were flown by some of the most experienced Luftwaffe pilots. Trautloft had fought in the Spanish, Polish and French campaigns and already had shot down 10 enemy aircraft. Two of the others were fighter aces and already had reputations as “Spitfire killers”, having shot down five Spitfires over Dunkirk during May 1940.

Trautloft's Staffels had covered some low-level bombing attacks on Allied shipping and after escorting the bombers safely back to France, returned to sweep back across the Channel in search of RAF interceptors. In the far distance, roughly 15,000 feet below, Trautloft spotted aircraft climbing from Hawkinge. It was 12:43 PM, only about eight minutes after the No. 141 Squadron's Defiants had taken off for their first combat mission. According to Trautloft's diary: "Suddenly Lieutenant Wehnelt reported over the wireless 'down below to the right civil aircraft just crossing the English coast.' I looked towards the spot and located the aircraft, counting three, six, nine of them. They seemed to have only just taken off. They climbed rapidly and made a large turn towards the middle of the Channel coming straight for us. They had not spotted us yet and so we headed towards them out of the sun. When I was only 800 metres or so above their formation, I noticed the aircraft had turrets behind the cockpit. The aircraft were neither Hurricane nor Spitfire. 'Defiant' suddenly went through my head - heavily armed two-seaters whose back gunners have four heavy machine guns with enormous firepower. They had obviously been sent up to attack the bombers. The enemy formation was still flying tightly together, as if on exercise, when suddenly it turned back toward England. I did not understand at all what this manoeuvre was for. I pulled over and dived towards the rearmost Defiant with my *schwarme flieger* [flight leaders] Wehnelt, Kath and Pichon, following behind.... I aimed for the right-hand Defiant. Suddenly all hell broke loose. The Englishmen had seen us."

The Me 109s had achieved almost complete surprise, and within about five minutes, four of the Defiants had crashed into the Channel and three others, all badly damaged, were desperately trying to make it back to base, leaving only two Defiants, piloted by Squadron Leader William Richardson and Pilot Officer Hugh Tamblin facing impossible odds. Richardson broke off the combat and he and Tamblin returned to base. Richardson's air gunner, P.O. Anthony Halliwell and Tamblin's gunner, Sydney Powell, both claimed kills on Me 109s.

The Me 109s chased the damaged and fleeing Defiants back to the British coast and were met by No. 111 Squadron Hurricanes that had been scrambled to assist the returning Defiants. No. 111 pilots reported shooting down four of the Me 109s.

The aftermath was entered in the Squadron's Operations Record Book, an entry from which is shown below. After missing crew were accounted for, the total losses were four pilots, six air gunners and six aircraft.

19th JULY, 1940.					
DEFIANT.					
L. 6999.	S/L. RICHARDSON.	Patrol.	12.39	15.00	Returned safely.
L. 7001	P.O. HALLIWELL.				" "
L. 7009	F/L. LOUDON.				Pilot, injured.
L. 6974.	P.O. PARKES.				Air Gunner, uninjured.
L. 6995.	F/L. DONALD.				Pilot killed
L. 7015.	P.O. HAMILTON.				Air Gunner killed.
L. 7016.	P.O. KEMP.				Pilot missing, believed killed.
L. 7014.	SGT. CROFTIE.				Air Gunner missing, believed killed.
L. 6983.	P.O. HAWKIN.				Pilot missing, believed killed.
	SGT. CUR LEX.				Air Gunner missing, believed killed.
	P.O. KIDSON.				Pilot missing, believed killed.
	SGT. ATKINS.				Air Gunner missing, believed killed.
	P.O. CARTER.				Pilot injured.
	SGT. SLATER.				Air Gunner missing.
	P.O. TAMBLIN.				Returned safely.
	SGT. POWELL.				" "
	P.O. MACDOUGAL.				" "
	SGT. WISE.				Air Gunner missing.

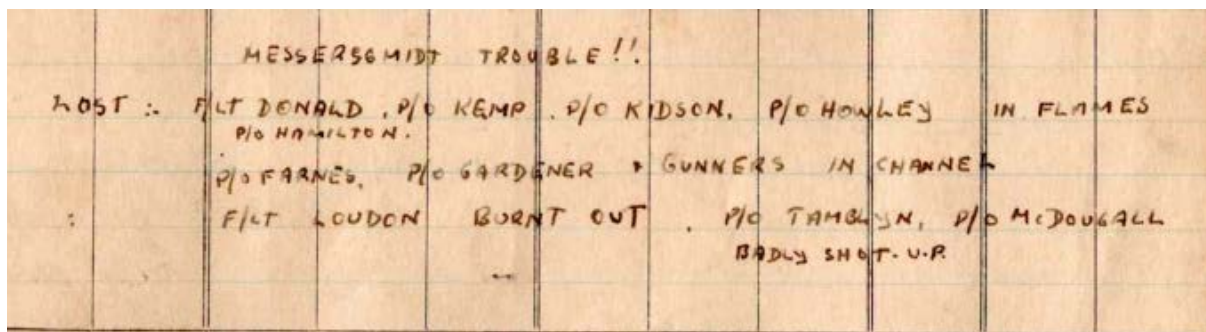
The Air Ministry immediately imposed a media blackout, preventing any reporting of the fate of No. 141 Squadron. Dowding ordered what remained of No. 141 Squadron out of the front line and they were moved to Prestwick in Scotland.

Was Noel Constantine Involved in the “Slaughter of the Innocents?”

Geoff Constantine has many wartime letters written by his uncle. A letter Noel Constantine wrote to his mother, dated 28 August 1940, contained the following:

“We had held together pretty well for eight months, then one day we were utterly surprised over the French coast by a mass of German fighters. They came out of the sun... When we headed for home, poor old Gardiner never got there. His engine was streaming oil and petrol, he just suddenly dived into the sea. As we reached the coast, Donald’s aircraft blew up. He and his air-gunner were burnt to death. Johnny London crashed 100 yards from the aerodrome, just could not quite make it. We lost six of our boys and their six gunners, three were New Zealanders and one Canadian. The CO, Tamblyn and myself alone got back. That rather finished us for the day, though we did have the satisfaction of seeing a few of their fighters slide away in flames too. That evening I went to London and went to several night clubs and got thoroughly smashed.”

Noel Constantine’s logbook showed an “operational patrol” from Hawkinge that day of only 15 minutes duration, flying Defiant No. L7011, which was not recorded in the Operations Record Book as flying that day. Next to Noel Constantine’s logbook entry for the 15-minute patrol on 19 July 1940 was the following note, listing the known casualties from the incident with Me 109s:



What appeared to be a firsthand account in his letter to his mother and the logbook entry, tended to infer Noel Constantine may have been present. However, searches of related documents, including combat reports and 141 Squadron records held in the U.K. National Archives, internet research and numerous references, all showed that only three of the nine aircraft apparently returned and that these were piloted by Squadron Leader Richardson and Pilot Officers Tamblyn and MacDougall. MacDougall had experienced engine failure after two attacks by Me 109s, and believing he had been shot down, he ordered his air-gunner to bail out. On his descent to attempt a water landing, the engine restarted and P.O. MacDougall was able to return to base. Having received no response from his air-gunner, and believing him to have been killed, PO MacDougall was surprised to find the turret empty when he landed back at his base. Air-gunner Sgt J.F. Wise had apparently jumped and was lost while somewhere over the Channel.

Not being prepared to accept there appeared to be no official record of Noel Constantine’s involvement in the events of 19 July 1940 and finding reference to the same letter to Noel’s mother in a recently published book by Bryn Evans, titled *“Air Battle for Burma, Allied Pilots’ Fight for Supremacy”*, which was dedicated to Noel Constantine and his wife Beryl, I contacted the author and asked him if he could point me in the direction of any corroborative evidence. The author was unable to help, saying he had “no reason to doubt Noel Constantine’s account in his letter” and that “official records can often be inaccurate and/or incomplete, and never provide much detail or tell the full story of events.”

After making enquiries with the Boulton Paul Defiant Facebook Group, I was put on to Aviation Historian and authority on the Boulton Paul Defiant, Andy Long. Andy is in the process of writing a soon to be published book titled, "The Defiant. By Day, By Night."

Andy was in possession of and provided a copy of an 11 Group Intelligence Communique that was sent to Fighter Command HQ at 16:59 hours on 19 July 1940, referring to **nine** aircraft leaving Hawkinge at 1230 hours and **another aircraft taking off five minutes later**. This aircraft was said to have "failed to connect with remainder of Squadron and landed at Hawkinge safely at 1300 hours." Later in the document it refers to "**4 aircraft** including the one which did not take part in the action landed Hawkinge 1253 hours to 1305 hours."

C O P Y .
S.A.S.O.
A.M.L.O.
Copy to:-
P.L.O.
D.A.Cdr.
H.P.L.O.
Wing Commander, "I".

H.Q.F.C. INTEL.
11 GR. INTEL.
TO H.Q.F.C. INTEL
FROM NO. 11 GROUP INTEL19/25..... 19/7/40. SECRET.

FOLLOWING COMPOSITE REPORT RECEIVED FROM HAWKINGE.

9 AIRCRAFT 141 SQUADRON LEFT HAWKINGE 1230 HOURS TO PATROL 20 MILES SOUTH OF FOLKESTONE AT 5000 FEET ONE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF FIVE MINUTES LATER BUT FAILED TO CONNECT WITH REMAINDER OF SQUADRON AND LANDED HAWKINGE SAFELY AT 1300 HOURS. THE 9 AIRCRAFT PATROLLED AT POSITION GIVEN AND WERE THEN VECTORED TO A POINT OVER CAPE GRIS NEZ AT 5,000 FEET. 12 ME 109'S SUDDENLY ATTACKED OUT OF THE SUN FROM 20,000 FEET WHEN OUR AIRCRAFT WERE IN SECTION ASTERN FORMATION. 3 OF 141 SQUADRON WERE SEEN TO CRASH INTO THE SEA ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AND ONE ME109 DESTROYED CONFIRMED SHOT DOWN INTO SEA BY A/G. P/O HALLIWELL AND SGT. POWELL. 141 SQUADRON BROKE FORMATION AND FLEW BACK TOWARD HAWKINGE THE ATTACK HAVING LASTED ONLY A VERY FEW MINUTES. ONE AIRCRAFT 141 SQUADRON CRASHED IN FLAMES NEAR DOVER, THE PILOT P/L DONALD WAS KILLED AND THE A/G. P/O HAMILTON IS MISSING HAVING BAILED OUT. ANOTHER AIRCRAFT 141 SQUADRON CRASHED JUST BEFORE REACHING HAWKINGE AIRCRODROME WHEN ENGINE CUT OUT. A/G. P/O FARNES HAD PREVIOUSLY BAILED OUT AND IS UNINJURED. PILOT P/L. LOUDON IS INJURED. ANOTHER AIRCRAFT 141 SQUADRON CRASHED IN SEA NEAR DOVER. PILOT P/L. GARDNER RESCUED AND IS IN HOSPITAL WITH HEAD INJURIES. A/G. SGT. SLATTER IS MISSING. A/G. SGT. WIRE ALSO BAILED OUT AND IS MISSING BUT HIS PILOT P/O MCDUGAL MANAGED TO BRING HIS AIRCRAFT BACK SAFELY. 4 AIRCRAFT INCLUDING THE ONE WHICH DID NOT TAKE PART IN THE ACTION LANDED HAWKINGE 1253 HOURS TO 1305 HOURS. TWO OF THESE WERE FOUND TO BE U/S. ON LANDING. OUR CASUALTIES FOUR PILOTS KILLED OR MISSING AND TWO INJURED AND FIVE A/Gs. MISSING. SIX AIRCRAFT DESTROYED AND TWO U/S. ENEMY CASUALTIES 1 ME 109 DESTROYED CONFIRMED.

T.O.D. 1659. JP VA.
R. 1659. DMB. 19/7/40..

According to Andy Long, Squadron Leader Richardson had entered flying time of 35 minutes in his own logbook, the nine Defiants were engaged about 15 minutes after taking off and the whole encounter took just over five minutes. The 15 minutes recorded in Noel Constantine's logbook and the fourth

aircraft returning at about 1300 hours, appear to be consistent with Noel Constantine being in the lone Defiant that took off after the others and it is quite likely he witnessed some of the events described in his letter.

After Noel Constantine returned with No. 141 Squadron to RAF Turnhouse in Scotland, he trained for and began flying night-fighter operational patrols in Defiants. No.141 Squadron moved to RAF Gatwick around mid-September 1940 and then RAF Gravesend in November 1940. During the later part of 1940, Noel Constantine bailed out on one occasion, only to have his parachute caught in a tree, where he was suspended until morning brought a rescue. On another occasion, he was shot down over the North Sea, was rescued by a Royal Navy destroyer, on which he survived further attacks by U Boats before reaching port in Rosyth, Scotland.

Following attendance on a two-week course at No. 1 Blind Approach School, RAF Watchfield, in May 1941, flying Ansons, Noel Constantine was posted as an instructor to No. 60 Operational Training Unit at RAF East Fortune, serving between June and September 1941.

While at No. 60 OTU, Noel wrote a poignant letter home to his sister Daphne in Australia. The letter, dated 19 June 1941, was as follows:

“Sis darling,

Just received yours three months ago and now I have one of those rare urges to write. I seldom write anybody now, Briny much as I have the desire my tired energies do not respond..... I have had a hell of a time darling, no words can describe, no, not me but the incredible sufferings, the tragedies, the heart-rending episodes that could not be described in a thousand books, have been mine as an intimate witness. I am all alone now, my friends whom I have fought with, admired, even loved, are no more. In their places are youngsters fresh from Canada, Australia and other Dominions, eager for battle, eager to tread the path of those ill-fated and wonderful young men that saved the British Empire in the stark days of September. I have seen them, Sis, these young newcomers, ready to show the world, welcomed them as brothers from home... And lost them the same day. C'est la guerre.

Well, out of this frightful slaughter I remain, a war veteran. I laugh like hell when I think of that - that I should remain after all these battles and combats, and darling there have been so many. Tonight, I feel like a prisoner in a cage, with the cup of water just out of his grasp. I mean I am caged here in a war in England so far surviving, and Australia a mirage in the distance. I want to come back to you all, Sis.... I have been through so much, yet there is so much ahead.... I long for Australia; your letters make me yearn even more. I am sick of blood and flames. I want life and I want gaiety; I want to be your Ugg in Australia; I want to find some of my lost humanity and naïveté and yet I wonder if I would be content.... How I would find Australia if by chance I suddenly found myself home. I know this war would draw me like a drug, the restlessness which is my inheritance which draws me to excitement like a moth to a candle would irresistibly bring me back to the front...

You see, for the first time since war began, except for my wounds and measles and whatnot, I have been taken off operations for a rest - that is I am now posted to an Operational Training Unit as an instructor for two or three months before I go back to my Squadron, - 23 now - not 141 - and for the first time the old nerves are settling down and I am beginning to think I want to go back to it all, but the days here in Scotland (again, our long and sunny, and somehow Australia has sneaked into my heart again and long for the dust and the heat and Aussie girls in summer frocking.... I'm tired of being English - I want to be an Aussie again.

Sis, I have written home often. Did you get them? Today I cabled Mother again, in stock phrases, that the Post Office only allows. I hope you get them. Also I got your cables, your parcels, your newspapers and whatnot's, comfort funds, cigs and socks. I cannot thank you all enough, it all means so much these days.

Just before I left my squadron I had some luck over Belgium and Holland and was mentioned in despatches for the third time.

After this winter I may cry off operations and go to Canada, but I do not want to desert the cause just yet until I have satisfied myself I have really put up a good show.

Enough of me. Self-analysis is a bad thing, especially in war time. Life in England has changed Sis, since you were here. One is sparsely fed on essentials only at a greatly increased cost of living. I would lose 33% of my pay immediately in income tax, and probably another 20% or more in increases in prices - in fact I am a damned sight worse off now as a Flight Lieutenant than as an Acting Pilot Officer before the war. I no longer run my car - I can't afford to do so. Just a few drinks & go to London when possible.... I read with avid interest all your letters Sis. Tonight, I went out to the coast and saw the same horizon we used to watch from the Back Beaches, the same wisps of smoke behind the dunes which to us used to mean a bigger liner going out; rolling sand dunes which is typical of this part of Scotland with the odd scurrying bun-rab in the tufts of marram grass - yet still not home. If only I knew the old Crossley was parked a mile away and we had to hurry back for the evening dance at Erehwon or with the mad raving crowd at the Isle of Wight - that long strip of moonlit beach we wandered on our way to the evening boat - I have not forgotten, Sis. How young we were then - how many thousands of years ago. What freak of memory bridges a telescope across all that stretch of time to bring those marvellous times so close.

Smithy, Hugh Tamblyn, Peter Tracy, Ian Arthur, Ian Long, John Edwards, Dennis Williams, and Geoffrey Pledger, Sam Allard and Doug Hodginson have all gone. Remnants of 141! Three were Aussies, just been over about two months and another a New Zealander. Guess that they just did not have time to learn. It shook me because it was more than 1/3 of the pilots of my old squadron.

Have been flying "Havoc" or otherwise known as "Bostons" the last few months and find it a super-super-super aeroplane. Had an extremely interesting and exciting job - I am afraid the censor will not permit me to tell you exactly what. Anyhow over Holland, Belgium, France most nights, bombing and ground strafing - in fact very interesting assignments. Tell you all about it after the war.

Crete has come and gone. I rather wish I had been in that show. Perhaps it is just as well for my health and wellbeing I wasn't.

I want to get away from the war in this letter Sis, but it is frightfully difficult. I'm in it up to my neck myself, and there does not seem to be anything else in the world except the bombs, guns, aeroplanes and hate. For nearly two years now it seems that it is the Luftwaffe against A.N. Constantine. Ph.G, F.P.S., or rather Germany has picked out that particular young man and sooled about 40 million of her prize Huns onto him! That is a fantasy maybe, and each of us that has done any serious work feels just like that. It is hard to realise there are still places in the world like the Back Beaches of Phillip Island that have never heard the screaming of bombs and the crash of guns, the chatter of machine guns of warring aircraft.

As you know Sis, I was in the thick of the "Battle of Britain" - that I wouldn't have missed for quids as an experience - I hope someday to sit by our log fire in Woollooware and tell stories of those young heroes in that gigantic struggle. How young fighter pilots laughed and died - died laughing - what an epic! There were times when I prayed in the air, "God get me down out of this and I will never ever fly again, I promise", - only to be on another patrol an hour later. One cannot keep away, you know Sis. It's like a drug. Everyone knows it "can't happen to him" - but it does..... And so I'm going on for just one winter Sis. I am parking up after about six months more on operations because someday I want to see those places where youth was carefree and uncontaminated by the stench of war. I love the excitement of war, but I love too the excitement of peace - if I can ever settle down again....

Finishing up now, I must say au revoir. The time grows dear darling, nearer to my return. If there had not been this flareup I would have been on my way home next year. Perhaps I still may be!

Forgive this letter Sis, it is a very egotistical one and rather sordidly heavy. Do not get the wrong idea though. Your kid brother is still the complete fool and still retains his sense of the Constantine ridiculous!

All my love Sis. Do not worry about me. Give my very fondest to Mum and family. Happy take-offs Sis.

Noel!"



*The photograph **above** was taken at a happier time. Photographed in the long-gone beer garden of the George Inn, Crawley. Noel Constantine is shown dropping ash on the head of Geoffrey Pledger. The photograph was supplied by Andy Long and came via the late Tom Fitzgerald (Pictured second from the right), a New Zealander and great friend of Noel Constantine.*



Above: Noel Constantine (left) and Tom Fitzgerald DFC (right), taken at Cobham Hall when 141 were based at Gravesend, circa November 1940 to May-1941. Fitzgerald also survived WW II and died on 16 August 2006. Image from the John Gard'ner album, provided by Andy Long.

Following his promotion to Flight Lieutenant being Gazetted in September 1941, Noel moved to No. 264 Squadron at RAF West Malling, serving between 16 October 1941 and 7 November 1941, again flying Defiants. Between 11 November 1941 and 26 December 1941, he flew Defiants with No. 125 (Newfoundland) Squadron at Fairwood Common. On 26 December 1941, Noel was posted to No. 87 (United Provinces) Squadron at RAF Colerne, where he received his first experience flying Hurricane II aircraft, as OC A Flight.

At the end of January 1942, Noel Constantine left England for the India-Burma Theatre, where in April 1942, he became the acting Squadron Leader of No. 273 Fighter Squadron at China Bay, Ceylon, where he began flying Fairey Fulmar reconnaissance/fighters in May 1942. The Squadron began re-equipping with Hurricanes from August 1942.

In late April 1943, exactly 12 months after taking over command of No. 273 Squadron, Noel Constantine was posted to command No. 607 (County of Durham) Squadron in India. The posting did not go ahead and his comment in his logbook was "Posting Cancelled. Bigger!"

On 21 June 1943, he took command of No. 136 Squadron, which was moving from Chittagong to Bagaichi in Burma. The Squadron had a welcome quiet period for the next few months, largely due to the monsoon preventing Japanese raids on Calcutta from across the Bay of Bengal. However, reconnaissance flights by the high flying and high-performance Ki 46 'Dinahas' continued over the Calcutta area. These aircraft were largely immune to interception but on 4 October 1943, a Hurricane from No. 136 Squadron probably destroyed one.

This was No.136 Squadron's last action with Hurricanes before it stood down on 20 October 1943, to re-equip with the Spitfire Mk Vc. The first to arrive was MA383 (**pictured over the page**), which was flown in by Noel Constantine. The aircraft had not yet received its squadron markings at the time of the photograph.



10
Spitfire VC MA383 of Sqn Ldr A N Constantine, No 136 Sqn, Baigachi, India, 10 October 1943

MA383 (thought to later have been coded 'HM-A') was the first Spitfire VC to be delivered to No 136 Sqn at Baigachi, near Calcutta, in early October 1943. It was initially flown by the unit on 10 October, when the unit's CO, Sqn Ldr Noel Constantine, flew circuits in it for 20 minutes. He noted, 'Lovely machine, light, graceful, fast – oh, so much faster than the beloved "Hurribuses"!'. Constantine, who had flown Defiants during the Battle of Britain, had all his success with Spitfire VCs over Burma, totalling at least eight claims. MA383 later joined No.615 Sqn and crashed near Palel during an interception on 29 May 1944, killing the pilot, Sgt H K Young.

By November 1943, No. 136 Squadron became the third fighter squadron in the theatre to re-equip to Spitfires and was soon declared operational. The Spitfires were to have a profound effect, giving superiority in performance over the Japanese for the first time.

The top of the page in Noel Constantine's logbook, for December 1943, is marked "Shooting Season Opens!!!!" The logbook pages, from December 1943 to the end of March 1944, are a valuable resource for researchers as they contain detailed notes of events. As an example, one entry, for 31 December 1943 recorded 26 enemy aircraft claimed as destroyed and one probable. His notes against that date were as follows:

	11	BOMBERS	DESTROYED	1	PROBABLY	DES.
	CLAIMS	3-DE	3 FIGHTERS	DESTROYED	, SEVERAL	
			PROBABLY	+ DAMAGED.	2. JAP	CR. COLLIDED MID AIR
		F/LT	BROWN	SHOT DOWN	BUT	RESCUED.
CLAIMS	F/LT	CONWAY	5	F/SGT	CROSS	4 + 1 F/LT
	F/O	GARVIN	2	F/O	BUTLER	1 F/LT
	F/SGT	CLARKE	1	F/SGT	BUNTING	1 + 1 F/O
						MOORHOUSE 1
		SELF	JUMPED	11	SQUADRON	INSTEAD
						SUCHER!
	F/O	GARVIN				SHOT UP.

Following No. 136 Squadron's success on 31 December 1943, claiming 11 aircraft destroyed, Noel Constantine received a complimentary telegram from Prime Minister Winston Churchill, congratulating them.

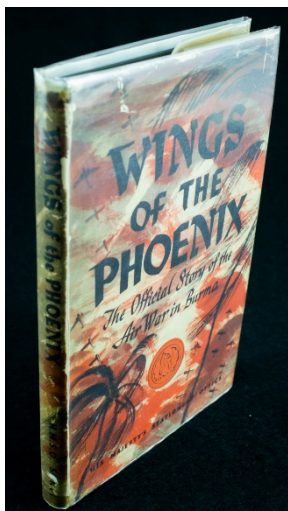
An entry in Noel Constantine's logbook for 1 January 1944 showed a test battle climb in a Spitfire Mk. VIII, attaining an altitude of 40,000 feet in 12.5 minutes. This was quicker than an earlier RAAF Headquarters, Directorate of Technical Services, Special Duties and Performance Flight test, on 30 December 1943, where the test aircraft had only reached about 36,000 feet in 12 minutes.

According to Noel Constantine's logbook, under his command No. 136 Squadron's tally while flying Spitfires, between December 1943 and March 1944, was 35 destroyed, 22 probably destroyed and 33 damaged enemy aircraft. Noel Constantine's personal tally during this period, making him an 'ace', was three destroyed, three probably destroyed and two damaged Japanese fighters.



The image **above** did the rounds of newspapers in early 1944. One of the headlines from that period was **"Spitfire Squadron 'bags' fifteen Japs in one day."** Pictured **above** are: Squadron Leader Noel Constantine seated in the centre on the wing of Spitfire Mk Vc HM-E, with four other 'aces' of 136 Squadron RAF, January 1944. From left: Flying Officer DJ 'Barney' Barnett (RAAF), Flying Officer Frank E Wilding DFC (RAF), Squadron Leader A N 'Noel' Constantine (RAAF), Flight Lieutenant A G 'Gordon' Conway DFC (RAF) and Flight Lieutenant Dennis E W Garvan DFC (RAAF). (Private collection of Noel and Geoff Constantine, and Interservices Public Relations Directorate, India, Pen 547)

In late March 1944, Noel Constantine was promoted to Wing Commander Tactics at Far East Command Headquarters, where he oversaw air fighter tactics until sometime in 1945.



Between 24 October 1945 and 9 November 1945, the last flight recorded in his RAF logbooks, Noel Constantine had piloted a Mosquito, conveying Wing Commander Leslie Kark around locations in Burma and the Far East. Wing Commander Kark was the author of the book *Wings of the Phoenix: The Official History of the Air War in Burma*, first published by the Air Ministry in 1949.

In *Wings of the Phoenix*, Kark described Noel Constantine as "a great Australian and an inspiring leader."

On 28 January 1947, Kark had sent a draft of the book to Noel Constantine, asking for his feedback. After learning of Noel Constantine's death in Indonesia, on 10 October 1947, Kark wrote to Noel's sister, Daphne, in Australia. The text of the letter appears over the page.

"Dear Daphne Constantine,

Thank you very much for your letter about Noel, who was a great and well-loved friend...one of the finest fighter pilots of the Burma War.

The news [of his death] was a shock to my wife and myself, who knew both Noel and Beryl. Noel was so genuine and grand a person, and such fun. His going leaves me infinitely sad for you, who knew him so much better than I, but sad too for myself. I cannot really express how much this thing has hurt, and it seems pointless to try. Good luck, and God bless, Leslie Kark."

Noel Constantine resigned from the RAF in December 1946. The Air Commander in Chief, Far East, Air Marshall Sir George Pirie, KBE, CB, MC & DFC, wrote a reference for Noel, dated 12 April 1947:

From: Air Marshal Sir George Pirie, KBE, CB, MC, DFC.



Headquarters
Air Command
FAR EAST.

12th April 1947

TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN.

Mr. Noel Constantine.

Mr. Noel Constantine served with the R.A.F. during the 1939-45 war with great distinction both as a day fighter and a night fighter pilot, taking part in many successful engagements and reaching the rank of Wing Commander. Later he served on the Operations Staff of the Air Command Southeast Asia. There in my capacity as Deputy Allied Air Commander in Chief I had an opportunity of observing his work, which was always of a high order and meticulously executed. I formed a high opinion of his abilities and regard him as a young man of considerable promise with a pleasant personality, a forceful character and an excellent brain which he uses to good effect. It was a great loss to the R.A.F. when he decided to leave the Service and enter civilian life and I was very sorry to see him go. I am certain he will do well in whatever business he may be engaged on and I shall be glad to give any further information required about this gentleman.

George Pirie

THE TRAGIC DEATHS OF NOEL AND BERYL CONSTANTINE – 29 JULY 1947

During WWII, Noel Constantine met prominent London dress designer and divorcee Beryl de Radclyffe Openshaw. The two became a couple, as best they could in those times, but never married. Beryl later changed her name by Deed Poll to Beryl Constantine. After the war, Beryl moved to Melbourne, where she had plans of opening her own dress house but was thwarted by the shortage of post war materials and staff. Newspapers of the time recorded comments she made about Australian women wearing their skirts too long. One of the articles was in *The Hobart Mercury*, 26 August 1946. Another, of unknown origin, reported her stating that the fashion in London was to wear “short tight skirts” and long jackets, with the skirts about 1.5 inches below the knee, whereas the Melbourne fashion was about 2.5 inches longer. Apparently, Melbourne women were “furious” with her comments.

Details of Noel and Beryl Constantine’s movements after Noel resigned from the RAF in December 1946, through to their deaths on 29 July 1947 are somewhat sketchy. The Constantines are reported to have moved to Singapore, where Beryl continued trying to establish a post war clothing business, while Noel was reported to be establishing a private charter plane business, flying Dakotas. In amongst building her business, Beryl was reported to have also supported Noel by working as an air hostess on his flights. Noel’s nephew, Geoff Constantine, was aware his uncle had a lot of plans, but he had no knowledge of a private charter plane business.

What we do know is that at the time of their deaths, Noel and Beryl Constantine were on board a Douglas C-47B-20 Dakota (VT-CLA), owned by Indian Biju Patnaik’s Kalinga Airlines (later nationalised and merged into Air India in 1953). The aircraft was chartered by the Indonesian Government and was being flown by Noel Constantine, between Singapore and Indonesia.

Historically, the Dutch East Indies, consisting of what is now Indonesia, had been a Dutch Colony for about 300 years prior to WWII and was then under three years of Japanese occupation during WWII. After Japan had been defeated, it was expected the Dutch would soon attempt to retake their former colony. On 17 August 1945, Sukarno, who had been a leader of the Indonesian struggle for independence since the 1920s, proclaimed himself President of Independent Indonesia.

India took a keen interest in the Indonesian freedom struggles and in 1946, India’s Prime Minister Nehru asked Biju Patnaik, the owner of Kalinga Airlines, to use his dozen Dakotas, to assist the Indonesian freedom fighters, by ferrying planeloads of medicines and humanitarian assistance (and possibly even arms and ammunition). Biju Patnaik and his pilots flew numerous sorties, evading the Dutch blockades. The planes flew from Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) in India, with fuel stops in Mohanbari and Singapore.

The new country needed an army and several days after declaring independence, a force known as the “Indonesian People’s Security Bureau” was formed to undertake security duties. The Air Division of this force was also formed, using ex-Japanese planes scattered everywhere. The most numerous of these aircraft were the Yokosuka K5Y1 ‘Willow’ trainers, which were hastily used to train newly recruited cadets. At that time there was only one Indonesian (Flying Officer Agustinus Adisucipto) who held a multi-engine pilot licence from the pre-war Dutch Flying School. He was assisted by a few Japanese pilots who had decided to remain in the newly born country. The new roundel for the ex-Japanese aircraft was created by painting the lower half of the red Japanese Hinomaru white, reflecting the red and white of the new Indonesian flag. **Over the page** is an image of a captured Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar used by the Indonesians in the War of Independence, painted with the early roundels and full fin flash.



Noel Constantine supported a free Indonesia. In a letter Beryl Constantine wrote to either Noel's mother and/or sister, dated 24 July 1947, Beryl advised that Noel had been appointed as "Permanent Advisor" to the fledgling Indonesian Air Force. Reflecting on the Indonesian freedom movement, Beryl wrote, "we are very sorry for them... they are really such extremely nice people... I do not think the Dutch will be able to take over complete control [of Indonesia], [the Indonesian's] freedom means far more than their lives to them. Five days later, Beryl herself and her partner died in support of Indonesia's independence movement.

Tensions continued to rise, as the Dutch tried to reclaim their former colony. A Dutch assault was launched on 21 July 1947, destroying most of the Indonesian aircraft on the ground. However, some planes survived and were hidden in remote bases.

At dawn on 29 July 1947, three of the surviving Indonesian 's aircraft, comprising two ex-Japanese Yokosuka K5Y1 'Willow' trainers and a Mitsubishi Ki-51 'Sonia', light bomber/dive bomber, conducted raids, dropping incendiary bombs on Dutch army barracks at Semarang, Salatiga and Ambarawa. While these raids did not have any serious effect on the Dutch positions, it proved that the Indonesian Air Force still existed, contrary to Dutch claims of destroying the Indonesian Air Force, a week earlier. Dutch Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk fighters tried to locate the attacking Indonesian aircraft, which had quickly landed at Maguwo Air Base, near Yogyakarta (now Adisucipto International Airport).

Earlier that morning, at about 1 AM (West Indonesian time UTC + 7) on 29 July 1947, Noel Constantine, his co-pilot, former Squadron Leader and Englishman, Roy Hazlehurst DFC and Indian engineer Bhida Ram, departed Singapore, in Alinga Airlines C-47 Dakota VT-CLA, loaded with three tons of Malaya and Indian Red Cross medical supplies, bound for Maguwo airfield at Yogyakarta.

Also onboard were Beryl Constantine, Zainul Arif (Indonesian Consul to Malaya), Abdulgani Handonotjokro (Indonesian General Secretary of the Republican Ministry of Information), Adisumarmo Wirjokusomo (founder of the Airborne Radio Telegraphic School and radio operator on board VT-CLA), Air Commodore (posthumously promoted to Air Vice-Marshal) Augustinus Adisucipto and Air Commodore Abdul Rahman Saleh, both of the newly formed Indonesian Air Force.

At about 5:30 p.m. VT-CLA approached Maguwo airfield from the west. Eyewitnesses reported that after completing a circuit, the defenceless Dakota had lowered its under-carriage for landing and was on final approach, when two Dutch East Indies Air Force P-40 Kittyhawk fighters fired upon the Dakota, destroying the port engine. The aircraft was reported to have gone into a dive before crashing into a tree and then into paddy fields. Only the tail section remained intact, as **shown below**.

Of the nine passengers and crew, seven died. Beryl Constantine and Abdulgani Handokotjokro, survived the crash but Beryl Constantine later died in hospital, leaving Handokotjokro as the sole survivor.



The flight had been pre-approved by British and Dutch forces and a safe flight guaranteed. The night before the flight departed, Malayan radio broadcast that a flight with the Registration number VT-CLA would be carrying medical supplies to Yogyakarta.

The Dutch denied knowledge of the flight and rejected that the Kittyhawks were involved in the crash, stating the plane seemed to have crashed into something and they also claimed it had no Red Cross markings. Autopsies of recovered bodies confirmed some had bullet wounds.

It was believed the shooting down was in retaliation for the bombing of Dutch positions at Semarang, Salatiga and Ambarawa earlier that morning, by two Indonesian Air Force cadets, with the Dutch later claiming the unarmed aircraft was mistaken for a 'Helen', a twin-engine Japanese bomber, similar to a type allegedly seen over Semarang during the air raids earlier that day. The two Dutch pilots named in the press were both former members of the NEI fighter squadron that had served in Australia during the Pacific War. Their apparent inability to identify the C-47, as a type which other Dutch units had also operated as part of the RAAF, as late as January 1947, lacked credibility. As did their claims that they had only fired warning shots and that the Dakota crashed while taking evasive action.

The tragedy caused international outrage. In 1951, the Netherlands Government, without recognizing any legal obligation, sent a Dakota C-47A and financial restitution to India.

Declared National Heroes in 1974, Augustinus Adisucipto, Abdul Rahman Saleh and Adisumarmo Wirjokusomo had airports named after them. Since 1979, the 29th of July has been marked as "Indonesia Air Force Dedication Day", in commemoration of the crash and in remembrance of their deaths. On 1 March 1948, a monument to commemorate the crash was built in Ngoto. In 2000, the bodies of Adisucipto and Saleh, and the bodies of their wives, were moved from their original burial sites to the memorial.

The monument includes a full-size replica of the tail from VT-CLA and a large bronze relief artwork, parts of which are shown over the page.



Pictured **above left** is the memorial at Ngoto. The plaque, shown **above right**, lists all of those who died, including Noel and Beryl Constantine and Roy Hazlehurst..



Pictured **above** are parts of a large bronze relief that can be seen in the background to the right of the monument.

Over the page is a photograph of a replica of the tail section, which forms part of the memorial.



In contrast to the beautiful monument in Ngoto, the remains of Noel and Beryl Constantine and Roy Hazlehurst were buried in the Kerkof Cemetery. When Geoff Constantine went to pay his respects to his uncle in 1966, he found only a large slab of concrete, with no headstone/s. **(shown below)**.

Approximately 50 years later, in January 2016, Dr Elisabeth Kramer, the Deputy Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, was in Jogjakarta for three weeks with an undergraduate field school. While there, her father, Michael Kramer (History Subcommittee of the Australia-Indonesia Association of NSW), who had been in contact with Geoff Constantine, asked her to find and check on the gravesite.

Dr Kramer's search began at the Air Force Museum, close to Adisucipto Airport, where there was a diorama display of the crash and some photos of the Indonesian victims, but no mention anywhere of Noel and Beryl Constantine. A museum official she spoke to knew of Noel Constantine and that he was the pilot. He gave Dr Kramer a map and directions to the Ngoto memorial and the Kerkof cemetery.



Dr Kramer found the memorial at Ngoto to be immaculately maintained, coated in marble and with a grand carved mural. To her, it seemed "a fitting final resting place for national heroes." However, it was not the final resting place for Noel and Beryl Constantine nor Roy Hazlehurst. At the Kerkof Cemetery, which she visited later that day, a pile of leaves, a tree and some rubbish **(shown below)** marked where cemetery officials 'believed' the three were buried. The concrete was said to have been damaged, possibly in an earthquake over 10 years earlier, but nobody seemed quite sure what had actually happened.



Dr Kramer's father, Michael Kramer, with the support and guidance of Geoff Constantine, undertook to rehabilitate the grave. The Australian government were no help. According to Dr Kramer, "As far as the Australian government were concerned, Noel had been a private citizen who flew his plane to Indonesia and was unfortunately shot down. It was tragic, but it was his choice." Also, Noel had not been serving in the military at the time, and even then, his war service had been with the British and not the Australian Air Force. Apparently for the same reason, the Australian War Memorial had little interest in documenting his death. While the Australian National Archives contained information, including reports on the crash and autopsy reports on victims, many of whom bore bullet wounds, their interest did not extend to ensuring the graves were maintained.

Attempts to reach out to the Australian Embassy, including to the Military attaché in Jakarta, were also met with little interest. However, on 10 November 2015, the Embassy had posted a short piece on Facebook about Noel Constantine and the crash, to commemorate Indonesian National Heroes Day. Unfortunately, the online pride with which the Embassy talked about Noel's sacrifice did not translate into any physical assistance with rehabilitating the grave.

In her October 2016 *new mandala – New Perspectives on Southeast Asia* piece, titled "Noel's Story, Whose history?" Dr Kramer described finding herself wondering why, given the national significance of the flight they were on, were the deaths of Noel and Beryl Constantine and Roy Hazlehurst, practically written out of the Dakota story. She believed "the Indonesian psyche at the time was carefully being shaped to instil pride and patriotism in its citizens and there was probably little room for foreign heroes in this nationalist project." "The grave site had remained a far cry from what the national heroes had, with not even a headstone. Noel Beryl and Roy had been all but forgotten; it was simply not a priority to commemorate the 'non-national heroes' aboard the Dakota."

Below are images of the rehabilitated grave and an enlargement of the headstone inscription, taken at Kerkof Cemetery in August 2016.



The following year, on 28 and 29 July 2017, the latter being the 70th anniversary of the incident, commemorations were held at the

Ngoto crash memorial and the rehabilitated Kerko Cemetery grave site. Geoff Constantine attended both commemorations and appears in images over the page.



Above: 70th anniversary at the Ngoto memorial grave sites of Indonesian National Heroes Augustinus Adisucipto and Abdul Rahman Saleh. Pictured (from left to right): Michael Kramer, grandson and son of Augustinus Adisucipto, Andrew Constantine (Geoff's son), Hadi Tjahjanto (at the time Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Air Force and currently Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, Geoff Constantine. The remainder are unknown. Photograph from Michael Kramer, History Subcommittee of the Australia-Indonesia Association of NSW.



Above: Taken at the Kerko Cemetery grave site of Noel and Beryl Constantine and Roy Hazlehurst, commemorating the 70th Anniversary of their deaths are (from left to right): Dr Elisabeth Kramer, Michael Kramer, Andrew Constantine, Geoff Constantine, Dr Steven Barraclough (Minister Counsellor & representing Australian Ambassador), unknown, unknown, Group Captain Steve Cook RAAF (Air Attache, Australian Embassy).

EPILOGUE

When I began researching this topic, I was unaware the exercise would appear to identify Noel Constantine and the much maligned and sometimes ridiculed Boulton Paul Defiant, as almost forgotten heroes.

Over 80 years after Noel Constantine flew a Boulton Paul Defiant during the Battle of Britain, and over 70 years since his death, we are grateful to authors like Bryn Evans (*Air Battle for Burma – Allied Pilots’ Fight for Supremacy*), Robert Verkaik (*Defiant, The Untold Story of the Battle of Britain*), Andy Long (Soon to be published *The Defiant. By Day, By Night*) and Elisabeth Kramer (*new mandela*), and for the efforts of Geoff Constantine and Michael Kramer, for preserving the memories of these almost forgotten heroes.



Above: Defiant Mark I night fighter, N3313 PS-P, of No. 264 Squadron RAF based at West Malling, Kent, in flight. Image from Imperial War Museum, IWM CH 3448.

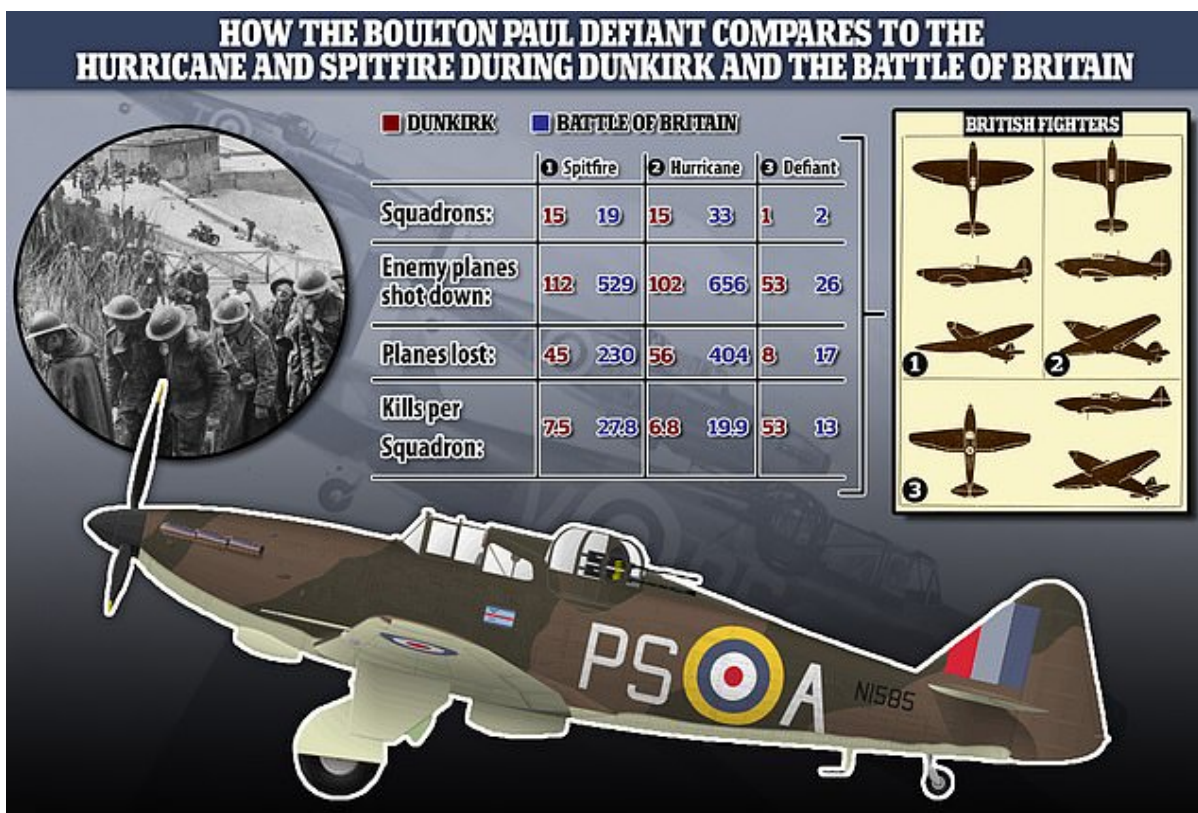
As for the Boulton Paul Defiant, Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding later commented on his decision to remove Defiants from day-fighter operations:

“I think it is now generally agreed that the single-seater multi-gun fighter with fixed guns was the most efficient type which could have been produced for day fighting. The Defiant, after some striking initial successes, proved to be too expensive in use against fighters and was relegated to night work and to the attack of unescorted bombers. It had two serious disabilities; firstly, the brain

flying the aeroplane was not the brain firing the guns: the guns could not fire within 16 degrees of the line of flight of the aeroplane and the gunner was distracted from his task by having to direct the pilot through the communication set.

Secondly, the guns could not be fired below the horizontal, and it was therefore necessary to keep below the enemy. When beset by superior numbers of fighters the best course to pursue was to form a descending spiral, so that one or more Defiants should always be in a position to bring effective fire to bear. Such tactics were, however, essentially defensive, and the formation sometimes got broken up before they could be adopted. In practice, the Defiants suffered such heavy losses that it was necessary to relegate them to night fighting, or to the attack of unescorted bombers.”

A Daily Mail online article by Darren Boyle, dated 27 May 2020, provided the following comparison between the three Battle of Britain fighters during Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain:



The Defiant holds the record for shooting down the most enemy aircraft in one day, when on 29 May 1940, No. 264 Squadron shot down 2 x Me 109s, 15 x Me 110s and one Ju 87 Stuka on their first mission of the day. In a list of the top RAF WWII gunnery aces, Frederick Barker topped the list with 13 victories and Albert Lippett came equal second with 12. Both Barker and Lippett were air-gunners with No. 264 Squadron Defiants. The list of 17 gunnery aces included a further 9 Defiant air-gunners.

In conclusion, it would appear that while the Boulton Paul Defiant was ridiculed by some for its lack of forward firing guns, the aircraft proved far deadlier than they generally seem to have been given credit for and they did the job they were designed to perform, as a “bomber destroyer”, a role which did not originally have an expectation they would be engaging with Me 109s.

On 19 July 2010, the 70th anniversary of the “Slaughter of the Innocents”, a memorial to commemorate the role played by the Airfields of Kent during the Battle of Britain, was unveiled at Rochester Airport by The Lord Lieutenant of Kent Allan Willett CMG. The ceremony included a flyover by a Spitfire IXe.



Above: Memorial unveiling 19 July 2010. Photograph Alan O. Watkins.



Above: Close up of the plaque, provided by Kelvin Carr, Airport Manager, Rochester Airport Ltd.

Sources:

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Dr Elisabeth Kramer, *Deputy Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and Author at new mandela*.
Andrew Thomas - *Spitfire Aces of Burma and the Pacific*.

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