

## **BBMF TO PERFORM FLYPAST OVER WALTON TO COMMEMORATE LOST LIVES**

On August 31, 1940, during the height of the Battle of Britain, Pilot Officer Gerard Maffett's Hawker Hurricane was shot down over Walton after his squadron intercepted enemy aircraft returning from a bombing raid on RAF airfields.

Pilot Officer Maffett managed to bale out of his stricken plane – but was too low to save himself. His aircraft ended up on the saltings at the north end of what used to be the Naze Golf Course and is now a public open space.

Now – almost 70 years on – the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) will commemorate the incident when a Hurricane, Spitfire and Lancaster make a dedicated flypast at the Naze Tower after taking part in the Clacton Air Show on the afternoon Friday August 27.

On route the formation is expected to fly low over Frinton and Walton seafronts, weather permitting.

There is no memorial to Gerard Maffett in Walton, although locally his sacrifice was brought to the public's attention in 1973 when his aircraft was excavated by a group of local people.

The remains were sent to the RAF Museum in London and to this day form the centre piece of a memorial to *The Few*, a term coined by Sir Winston Churchill to recognise the achievements of a small band of aircrew during Britain's hour of need.

Like so many of *The Few*, Gerard Maffett was a pre-war member of the RAF's Volunteer Reserve, learning to fly during evening and weekends.

Called up at the outbreak of war, the 24-year-old completed his training just in time to take part in what was then the greatest air battle ever seen. August 31 was his fifth and final encounter with enemy aircraft.

Parts of Gerard Maffett's 257 Squadron Hurricane are also held at the Walton Maritime Museum. Alongside them are parts from a Halifax bomber which also crashed at the Naze during the closing months of the war in 1945. All eight crew members were killed.

Three propeller blades from this bomber, recovered at the same time as Gerard Maffett's aircraft, now form a memorial to the mostly Canadian crew, in the memorial gardens next to Walton Parish Church.

Frinton and Walton Heritage Trust will have a display with a wartime theme at the Naze during the flypast.

Stephen Mayzes, TDC's Cabinet Member for Leisure, said the low flypast will be a poignant reminder of the Battle of Britain – and in particular the efforts of Pilot Officer Maffett.

“This is something special for the town of Walton and I am sure many will turn out to witness the Hurricane, Spitfire and Lancaster as they fly low over the area after their display at the Clacton Air Show,” he said.

“This being the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain it is a very special occasion and will mean a great deal to so many people.

“There are many stories of heroics in the skies as the RAF repulsed the onslaught of Hitler's air force and it will give people the chance to reflect.”

There were a number of other RAF casualties in the Walton and Frinton area during the war.

A Wellington bomber from 149 Squadron flew into a summer storm and was hit by lightning in September 1940 as he was making for the Channel ports of France and Belgium. One of the two engines was put out of action and the pilot turned for home.

Just as the crew thought they had reached the coast the other engine stopped and they baled out. However, they were still over the sea and only one of the crew survived.

After spending seven hours in the sea, the exhausted Pilot Officer Charles Parish finally reached the shore between Frinton and Holland-on-Sea. After recuperating he returned to operations but did not survive when on his second tour his aircraft was shot down over Denmark.

His Wellington bomber from the first tour is somewhere beneath the waves between Frinton and Walton Pier.

As the BBMF formation reaches the Naze and passes the Tower, the pilot of the Spitfire may well take time to reflect on the situation Flying Officer Frank Howell found himself in 70 years ago.

Desperately low on fuel and looking for a place to land he eventually made it onto land at Walton. He selected the Naze cliff top golf course and lined up on a fairway free of bunkers.

Safely down he managed to refuel and took off again over the cliffs – and managed to survive the rest of the war.

“There were other wartime aircrew that lost their lives in the Frinton and Walton area and I am certain a thought will be spared for all of them during the BBMF flypast,” added Cllr Mayzes.

“This year’s Air Show is certainly going to be a memorable event and, combined with the additional flypast, an occasion not to be forgotten.”

The Clacton Air Show takes place on August 26 and 27 and will feature the Red Arrows and the BBMF on both days, as well as a host of other aerial displays and exciting attractions on the ground.

For more information on the 19<sup>th</sup> Clacton Air Show go to the show’s website, [www.clactonairshow.com](http://www.clactonairshow.com)

**10/8/10**

### **NEWSDESKS**

For further information on this press release contact Nigel Brown, Tendring District Council’s Communications Manager on 01255 686338.

### **PHOTOS**

**1 Pilot Officer Gerard Maffett.**

**2 The memorial to the Halifax crew in the memorial gardens next to Walton Parish Church**