"Like a Breath of Wind"

Donald Moffat Wilson, RAF Pilot

By Richard Nairn

Donald Moffat Wilson was born in Dublin in 1923. He was only 21 years old and a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force when he died in action in Brittany, France in 1944. On 13 June 2009, 65 years after his death, a special ceremony took place in the village of Maroué, Brittany, to honour the memory of Donald Moffat Wilson. The Mayor of nearby Lamballe, described Donald as a hero who had helped to liberate France from German occupation. A plaque in his memory was unveiled by Rachel Pike, the eldest of Donald's nieces and nephews. Donald was just one of millions of Allied servicemen who died during 1939-45 but his story is one of a family at war and the hardship that they endured. A plaque at his former RAF airfield, Predannack Down, commemorating those who served during World War II reads: "Like a breath of wind gone in a fleeting second - only the memories now remain."

The Moffat Wilson Family

Donald's paternal grandfather, William was the son of Rev. Hamilton Brown Wilson and Susan Heron. All of his siblings had the surname Wilson but William appears to have adopted the name Moffat Wilson from an uncle, William Moffat, who was married to Mary Heron, an older sister of his mother. It seems that William may have added the extra part of the family name to distinguish himself from the many other Wilsons in the business world in Dublin at that time. They were henceforth known as Moffat Wilson. William was a chess champion, ranked fifth in Ireland, and he later became a stockbroker in Dublin. William married Kathleen Neilson and they had four sons, the youngest of whom was Guy Burgo Moffat Wilson, Donald's father, born in 1887. In 1911, William Moffat Wilson was living with his wife Kathleen in Waterloo Road, Dublin. He was a stockbroker but his youngest son, Guy, was not living at home at this time. At the age of about 23, Guy was employed by a wealthy family from Northern Ireland, called Mullins, to act as tutor to their young son. The Mullins sent their son with Guy to New Zealand to begin a new life. However, Guy missed his home and, in particular, a young lady called Edith Prenter who was, at this time, living with her widowed father, Samuel Prenter in Greystones, Co. Wicklow. Samuel Prenter was formerly Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland[1].

Patrick, Donald and Joan Moffat Wilson (about 1924)

In 1915, shortly after Guy returned home from New Zealand, he and Edith were married and they moved to live at a property called Coolatin Farm at Groomsport, near Bangor, Co. Down. It was there that their eldest son, Patrick, was born on 14th May 1916 and then a daughter, Joan, on 7th September 1917. Both children were baptised by their grandfather, Samuel Prenter, whom it is thought had moved to Northern Ireland to live with his daughter Edith and her family.

After the First World War in 1914-1918, William Moffat Wilson asked his youngest son Guy to come to Dublin and help him with the stockbroking business. Guy's three older brothers were not available to help. The eldest brother, Frank, had emigrated to Australia; Cecil was killed in action in the 1914-18 War; and Geoffrey was already a practicing clergyman. Edith and Guy Moffat Wilson moved to Dublin in 1919 where they bought a house at 2, Sydenham Road, Dundrum (beside Taney Parish church). However, William did not tell his son Guy in advance that there was a serious legal case pending against the stockbroking firm and this ultimately proved to be its downfall. William Moffat Wilson became mentally ill and was eventually committed to a mental hospital in Scotland, where it is thought he died about 1940. After the stockmarket crash of 1929, Guy was forced to sell the house in Dundrum, and he then rented a large house for his family in Foxrock, a fashionable suburb of south Dublin. The house, Trentham, on Leopardstown Road, is still there today, surrounded by an extensive, mature garden. During the 1930s, the stockbroking business was failing and Guy was unable to save it. During this time, he became an alcoholic, probably connected with the failure of his business and his father's mental problems.

Guy and Edith's third child, Donald, was born on 14th February, 1923 in Dublin. Four years later, twin sisters Margaret (Peggy) and Elizabeth (Beth) were born in September 1927. Donald attended a public (private) school in England, Sherborne School in Dorset. Donald was a keen boy scout, earning the prestigious King Scout Badge. In 6th form, he was a prefect in Lyon House in the school so he also had leadership qualities. His brother, Patrick also attended a public school in England. During the 1930s the Moffat Wilson family became very short of money They became dependent on help from one of Edith's sisters, Helen, who had married a wealthy Englishman and was recently widowed. At the outbreak of war in 1939, the family moved to England. Here they lived with Edith's older sister Margaret (Peg). Joan married Rev. Robert Pike in 1938 and they moved to live in Maryborough (now Portlaoise) in Ireland. Donald made regular visits to his older sister Joan in Ireland during his school holidays. Joan's eldest daughter, Rachel, remembers playing with Donald in the garden at Maryborough.

Donald's older brother, Patrick had enlisted as a soldier in the British army, while Donald was still a 16-year old schoolboy at Sherborne in Dorset. He had become a heavy drinker, even as a young man. While still living in Dublin about 1934, he had a serious road accident on the Kilmacud Road, with his sister Joan as a passenger in the vehicle. A pedestrian was killed in this accident. His father Guy joined up as a private in the Royal Army Service Corps serving in the area of Suffolk where the family lived at 277 Heath Road, Ipswich. Guy died suddenly on 6th June 1944, aged 55, of a heart problem, brought on by his addiction to alcohol. He is buried in Ipswich Cemetery. His commanding office Major R.C.L Capel-Smith wrote to Edith Moffat Wilson after Guy's death, saying that « your husband was a very gallant gentleman who always very worthily served his country ».

Pat Moffat Wilson in British Army uniform

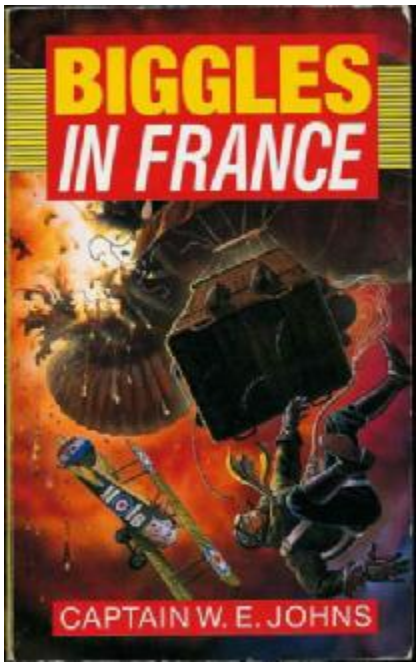
Fighter Boys

In the early 1940s, the defence of Britain was largely in the hands of a small group of mostly very young men. During the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, Donald Moffat Wilson was still at school in Dorset. From then on the fighter pilots of the RAF became known as the "Fighter Boys". The pilots who flew the RAF Spitfires became the heroes of the Allied war effort. They were credited with almost single-handedly defeating the German aerial invasion in the summer of 1940. Many, like Donald Moffat Wilson went straight from school into the RAF. They were young, carefree, adventurous and mostly unattached.

Donald Moffat Wilson was typical of a group of schoolboys who had become fascinated by flying at an early age. Patrick Bishop describes how many airfields became enchanted domains for surrounding schoolboys[2]. "On summer evenings Roland Beaumont would cycle from his prep school in Chichester to the RAF station at Tangmere, climb on to his bicycle to see over the hedge and watch 11 Squadron and 43 Squadron taking off and landing in their Hawker Furies. Watching the silver-painted biplanes, the sleekest and fastest in the airforce, he decided he 'wanted more than anything else to be on fighters'. Twelve years later he was in the middle of the Battle of Britain".

For Donald, his love affair with Spitfires and flying was probably much shorter. He attended Sherborne School from 1937 to 1941. His older brother Pat was already serving in the British Army and Donald would have been highly aware of the outbreak of war in 1939 and the dramatic events of Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain in 1940. Just a few miles from the school is the village of Yeovilton, which was the site of a new naval airbase constructed between 1939 and 1941. The Naval

Observer School moved to HMS Heron in mid 1940, with the Naval Air Fighter School soon following. Several units which were preparing for embarkation were also stationed at the site during the War. It is quite likely that Donald, who attended the nearby Sherborne School, may have visited Yeovilton, or at least would have seen the military aircraft landing and taking off from the airfield.



One of the most effective recruiting agents for the RAF was a fictional character known as "Biggles", *aka* Captain James Bigglesworth, who was created by the author W.E. Johns. Biggles books were highly popular with schoolboys of Donald's age and must have seemed very close to reality. Johns had flown himself with the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War and his stories began to appear in *Popular Flying* magazine in 1932. His first novel, *The Camels are Coming*, was published in the same year – when Donald was aged nine. "Biggles" was an irresistibly romantic figure to young schoolboys in Britain in the late 1930s. Many of his stories were based on real events and Johns made no attempt to hide the grisliness of fighter battles, emphasising the man-to-man nature of primitive air fighting. "One of the most characteristic features of the Great War", Johns wrote in the foreword to *Biggles in France*, "was the manner in which humour and tragedy so often went hand in hand. At noon a practical joke might set the officers' mess rocking with mirth. By sunset, or perhaps even within the hour, the perpetrator of it would be gone forever, fallen to an unmarked grave". The Biggles books were practically documentary in their descriptions of war in the air and their readers were absorbed and inspired by them.

Donald joined the RAF immediately on leaving school in 1941. Following training, he was commissioned as a Pilot Officer and attached to RAF 165 Squadron to be stationed at Predannack airfield in Cornwall. This airstrip is just a few miles from Lizard Point, the most southerly point of the British mainland, and the nearest take-off point for crossing the English Channel to France. Predannack Airfield is situated near the **village of Mullion. To the south of the village of Mullion the land gently rises up and levels out into a plateau at a height of around 85 metres above sea level. In contrast to the northern part of the parish this area remains as natural heathland, the growth of which is encouraged by the change in geology south of Mullion Cove. This area is called Predannack Downs, and is now part of the Lizard National Nature Reserve. In the centre of Predannack Downs lies Predannack Airfield. The southern extent of the parish is marked by a steep and narrow river valley cut into the downs, meeting the sea at Kynance Cove. The coastline along the edge of the Downs consists of high dramatic sheer cliffs.**

Building work began for an RAF advanced night fighter base to protect the nearby ports of Falmouth and Penzance during 1940 and RAF Predannack Down opened in 1941. It later transferred to RAF Coastal Command until it went into care and maintenance on 1 Jun 1946. During the Second World War Coastal Command squadrons flew anti-submarine sorties into the Bay of Biscay as well as convoy support in the western English Channel using aircraft such as Bristol Beaufighters and De Havilland Mosquitoes.

Donald's squadron, 165 (Ceylon) Squadron, was formed as a Spitfire-equipped fighter squadron at Ayr, Scotland on 6 April 1942. It spent the rest of the war carrying out the full gamut of operations for this type of unit. These began with defensive patrols in Scotland before moving south in August 1942 and beginning offensive operations over France. A return to Scotland in March was followed by another spell in the south from July 1943.

In August 1943 the squadron joined the Kenley Wing but the following month returned to the South-West from where it carried out escort missions, offensive sweeps and defensive duties until after 'Operation Overlord', the code name given to the D-Day landings. The V-1 attacks against South-East England, found the squadron in Kent as part of the anti-'Diver' forces. When this threat receded the squadron moved to East Anglia, where it began re-equipping with Mustangs in mid-December. These were used for long range bomber escort missions from February 1945 until the end of the war. In June it returned to Dyce in Scotland, where it re-equipped with Spitfires, moving to Norway on 20 June. Here it provided air defence cover for the region, pending the re-formation of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, eventually returning to Britain in January 1946 and disbanding at Duxford on 1 September 1946. The motto of 165 Squadron was *Infensa virtuti invidia* (Envy is the foe of honour).

D-Day and the aftermath

Planning for the invasion of Europe, to secure the defeat of Nazi Germany, had been underway for several years. The declaration of war by the USA was a critical factor and American forces had been building up in southern Britain for months before D-Day. When 6th June 1944 finally arrived, the Allied forces managed to gain a toehold on the north coast of Normandy, to the east of the Cotentin peninsula. The battle to consolidate the beachhead and establish a lodgement area began, and the next ten days became crucial to the success of the Normandy invasion. The Allies had to land men and materials in sufficient quantity to withstand any German counterattack and had to keep the Germans far enough at bay to enable this to happen. The Germans had twenty-seven Divisions, four of which were Panzer Divisions, within a 200-mile radius of the landing beaches. If these could be brought to bear on the invading Allied Army it would be rolled back into the sea.

The Allies however, had an important advantage – air superiority. The effect on the German convoys being rushed to

Normandy was devastating as Allied fighter-bombers ruthlessly prowled the countryside looking for targets. When the Typhoons and Mustangs found them they were easy prey and the Allied aircraft left a trail of burnt out and wrecked vehicles in their wake. RAF 165 Squadron was one of the many deployed to attack German convoys moving towards the Allied invasion forces. To counter this, the Germans began to move at night, but in doing so became vulnerable to ambushes set by the Marquis (the French Resistance). The combined effects of the Allied air forces and the Marquis was to delay the rapid arrival of German reinforcements allowing the invasion forces to consolidate in Normandy.

For the fighter pilots of the RAF, their job was one of defending the bridgehead and making sure that German reinforcements were stopped or at least slowed down before they reached the Normandy area. For weeks leading up to D-Day, many of the squadrons of the 2nd Tactical Air Force had been living 'rough' in order to be ready for the day they would fly over to a bridgehead area to operate from fighter strips behind the battle line. Once the Allied invasion force had pushed inland, these airstrips would be constructed by bulldozing a landing area across a reasonably flat expanse of farmland[3].

RAF fighters maintained an almost constant patrol line in anticipation of a strong reaction from Luftwaffe fighters which, in the main, did not materialise. These fighters came under constant anti-aircraft fire, not only from inland German flak gunners but also from Allied gunners, equally nervous at being attacked by German aircraft. There was a high attrition rate from anti-aircraft fire, some of it hostile, but much of it also from so-called 'friendly fire' [3].

Within a week, the supplies needed by the Allies to sustain their army in the field were flowing in at a steady rate and by 11 June 1944 more than 326,000 troops, 55,000 vehicles and 105,000 tons of supplies had landed on the beaches. Behind the sunken ships of the 'Gooseberry' breakwaters, vessels of every size and shape were engaged in the frantic task of bringing ashore supplies. Further out to sea the Rhino barges took on their cargos from the larger cargo ships and plied backwards and forwards between the ships and the beach. Landing craft, with their flat bottoms, sailed right up to the beaches to drop their ramps and offload their cargos of men, armoured vehicles, tanks and lorries. Two artificial 'Mulberry' harbours were set up, one in the American sector at Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer and one in the British sector at Arromanches. These were soon being used to offload men and supplies directly from the cargo ships. At Port-en-Bessin and Sainte-Honorine-des-Pertes two pipelines were run ashore for the transfer of petrol from tankers to the fuel dumps inland.

On the morning of 12th June 1944, as the American 101st Airborne division moved into Carentan, the German commander General der Atrillerie Marcks died in his vehicle after a low-flying attack by Allied fighters on a road north-west of Saint-Lo in Normandy. Marck's death and various other delays led to the German counter-attack being postponed to 13th June. This combined with intelligence from interception of the German communications, allowed the Allies to bring up more troop reinforcements before the main battle began. At dawn on 13th June the engagement between the Panzer divisions and American paratroopers began around the Carenten-Domville road[3].

By 18th June 1944 the battle of the beaches had been won, as the Allies were bringing far more men and equipment ashore than the Germans could bring to reinforce the Normandy area.

Donald Moffat Wilson in June 1944

The Operations Record Book of 165 (Ceylon) Squadron records the actual flights of the planes and their pilots. Some of the information here is quite detailed.

On 5th June 1944, the day before the D-Day landings, the Squadron made two non-operational flights from Predannack. The Operations Record book reads:

> ***Thirty-four aircraft covered convoys. Two were scrambled, two made a shipping Recco (reconnaissance) and three on a special Ranger (?); a total of 41 operational flights. The aircraft on Convoy Patrol covered a number of convoys consisting of merchantmen and naval units, all close inshore and all but one going east. The Scramble was uneventful, as was the Shipping Recco to Abervrach and Goulet area when some eight or ten mechant ships were seen inside the Mole and two Royal Navy destroyers. Intensive Bofors was fired from St Mathien. The special operation was round the Brest Peninsula to a point north-west of Ile Groix, returning overland after climbing up to 4,000 feet and eventually 13,000 feet. Photographs of fishing vessels along the south coast of the Peninsula were taken. As from about 12:30 hours today, all personnel were confined to camp.***

Although his father had died on D-Day itself, 6th June 1944, when all Allied forces were on high alert, Donald had received special permission to attend Guy's funeral. He took a long train journey from Cornwall to London and after the funeral on 11th June he returned by train to his base. It was on his return to his squadron on 12th June 1944 that he was sent out on his final flight – at a point when he must have been very tired and still in shock over his father's death.

On that day, 12th June 1944, 165 Squadron made nineteen operational flights and nine non-operational flights out of Predannack airfield. The Operations Record book records:

> ***Crossing in at Plouescat, a formation of five aircraft set course for Kerlin Bastard and Vannes, but two returned early as one pilot had jettison tank trouble and was accompanied to base by another. The patrol height varied from about 6,000 feet to 10,000 feet over France and the trips were uneventful – no flak and no E/A (enemy aircraft). At 11:30 hours, four aircraft carried out a Rhubarb (attack on ground enemy position) in the Guincamp-Lamballe area. A train at Guincamp area was attacked and damaged. A very large military convoy was attacked on the St.Brieuc-Lamballe road without clearly observed results, but strikes were seen. P/O D. Moffat-Wilson crashed after this attack. F/S J.J. McLean (N.Z. 417080) reported a dead engine after coming out over Brehat and baled out some 70 miles south of Start point. He was seen clinging to his dinghy. An A/S/R (air sea rescue) patrol by two aircraft was flown in the late evening to look***

> ***for the missing pilot but was recalled owing to a deterioration in the weather.***

This is the simple record by his Squadron of the loss of Donald Moffat Wilson. It is likely that his fellow officers had no idea at the time whether he had died or survived the crash. They did not record anything about the crash or how it happened, in contrast to the account of the ditching of J.J. McLean and his subsequent attempts to stay afloat. Donald had simply crashed and was not seen again.

The actual details of his crash are recorded in the Fighter Command List of operational Losses[3] as follows:

> ***12th June 1944: 165 Sqn. Spitfire IX MK 471 'N'. P/O D. Moffat-Wilson. Died. Rhubarb, noon. Encountered flak while attacking MT (motorized transport) west of Lamballe; crashed and burst into flames. Buried in Bayeux War Cemetery.***

Accident in France

The most complete account of Donald's crash comes from the eye witnesses on the ground near the village of Maroué on that day, 12th June 1944. The formation flew over the English Channel in search of the enemy on the east side of the department of Côtes du Nord, as it was known at the time. Around eleven o'clock, it reached the Lamballe area from the north, an area that was closely monitored due to the presence of the Paris-Brest railway line there. Suddenly, towards the southwest, it observed a long German column moving, contrary to what might have been expected, from east to west. The reason for this is unclear. One thing that is certain is that it had been on the move for several hours, for it had been reported at several points. It was made up of several horse-drawn wagons and a large number of well-armed soldiers. . The German column was stretched along the winding road that crossed the river *Truite* on the way to Saint Brieuc. The front of the column was already at the top of the hill near the place known as The Pel.

The leader of the Allied pilots gave the order to attack the convoy. Donald Moffat-Wilson, was flying the third plane in the attack. He was flying too low and did not see the electric power line that lay across his path. An eye witness reported that the tail of his aeroplane caught on the electric wires. The wires did not break but the rear of the plane struck the wooden pole which broke at the top. The aeroplane, although destabilized, continued to fly but it was all over: The airman tried to get going again by increasing the power of his engine, but with no

success. Again it became destabilized. Its power was not enough to prevent the crash for it had struck the ridge tiles of the roof of a farmhouse in the valley (there is a four-lane highway now in the place where the farm stood). After that, events happened very rapidly. The pilot had no longer any effect on the controls. The aircraft continued its crazy course across the road to Maroué and then dived at headlong speed into a little field, carving out a hole two metres deep. The hole was filled in several years ago by the farmer who was completely oblivious of why it was there. The contact with the ground slightly slowed the aeroplane as it smashed into the trees in a little wood known as the Green Wood. On the way through this copse, it tore everything in its path and caught fire. Such was the force that the motor was torn off and flung into a neighbouring field, and on across the Meslin road. The doomed pilot perished in the blaze with his aircraft.

The impact of the aircraft wing on a pine tree on the slope bordering on the Green Wood in Maroué, is still visible 64 years after the crash.

The Germans rushed to the spot and forbade the population to extinguish the fire that could have set the whole wood alight. But that was not the case. A witness reported a huge plume of smoke rising into the sky. The pilot's remains were interred, at the request of the occupants, in the farm beside Bellevue village close to a well. The priest in Maroué, the Reverend Blanchard, organized a funeral ceremony with the participation of the local population. For the following days flowers were placed on the grave and each day the Germans came and took them away and threw them on the manure heap at the farm. Irritated, they issued threats if this continued. Moffat-Wilson's body lay buried there for about one year before being removed to the military cemetery in Bayeux in Calvados. Strangely his grave lies at the extreme southwest in the corner as if looking out towards Brittany.

A scorched fragment of the parachute recovered from the crashed spitfire of Donald Moffat Wilson

Many Germans lost their lives in the attack on the convoy. A Frenchman, aged 68, returning from a family occasion in Rennes and tired as a result of the long walk, asked the Germans if he could sit at the rear of one of the wagons. That was a grave mistake because he died instantly. He was on his way to Binic. Many horses were killed. The Germans asked the local population for help to bury them in a nearby quarry. One witness reported a story, on the Pelican mound at the top of the slope, a joiner at the beginning of the war had left a katydid, which is a horse-drawn apparatus to move tree trunks. From

the sky, the RAF pilots mistook this contraption for a cannon and strafed it with each attack. In the end, it collapsed. A witness reported that the German column, traumatized by the attack, took three days to recover. The crash may be gauged by its range : it spread over 1.7 kilometres.

In the early stages of the event the dead pilot was identified as Canadian. Later, it turned out that the term Canadian was given to all Allied pilots by the local population. A fragment of Donald's parachute which was kept by one of the local witnesses is inscribed with the words:

"*parcelle do Parachute d'un aviateur canadien mort pour la France a Maroue 12 Juin 1944".*

The Spitfire Fighter

The Spitfire, the aircraft that Donald Moffat Wilson piloted, was a Mark IX model. This fighter was under constant improvement throughout the war. By early 1942, the Mk V Spitfire was being "trounced" by a formidable new opponent, the Focke-Wolf (Fw 190), which was a BMW radial-engined fighter of the Luftwaffe. Described as a lethal German fighter, these aircraft were only encountered in strength at the beginning of 1942. By this time, RAF Fighter Command had sixty squadrons of Spitfires, flown by a bewildering array of foreign nationals and well as British-born pilots. This sometimes led to difficulties in communication between the Allied pilots and their ground bases. By April 1942, the RAF lost 59 Spitfires in one month alone, mainly as a result of attacks by Fw 190s[5].

This led to the extraordinarily rapid development of the Mk IX, described as "a vamped up Mk V equipped with a potent two-speed, two-stage supercharged Merlin 60 series engine and a four-bladed propeller. The Mk IX proved to be 40 miles per hour (mph) faster that the Mk V and was quicker than the Fw 190 in almost every way, event at low level, where the German fighter excelled. Deliver toe RAF squadrons began in June 1942. The work on the new superchargers had been carried out at Rolls-Royce by Stanley Hooker, a mathematician by training. In late 1944, he had managed to get the Merlin engine to deliver 2,640 horse power (hp) for a full fifteen minutes. The maximum operational power achieved by this engine was a reliable 2,030 hp, a significant improvement on the Mk V[5].

If the Mk IV was considerably faster in every respect than the Mk V, it was much less easy to fly. This was because of a new fuel tank added behind the pilot. The extra power meant that, with just the regular 87-gallon tank ahead of the pilot, the range of the Mk IX would have been too short to be of value in combat. However, pilots found that the additional fuel tank, when full, upset the aircraft's stability. They had to work hard to keep the Mk IX in straight and level flight until a least half of the rear tank was emptied. Only then did the aircraft come into its own and fly like the thoroughbred Spitfire should.

The Mk IX was first flown in combat, alongside the Mk V, for Operation Jubilee, a disastrous, small-scale precursor to D-Day carried out when 6,000 Canadian troops were put ashore at Dieppe on 19 August 1942. Of the 106 allied aircraft lost that day, 88 were fighters and most of them Spitfires. The Mk IX excelled in high flight. It could easily fly at an altitude of 43,000 feet, beyond the reach of existing German fighters. Without pressurised cockpits, even the fittest pilot could only remain at such extreme heights for five, or at best ten, minutes. If the pilots dived down too quickly from such altitudes, they would be in very real danger of suffering what sub aqua divers know as 'the bends'. This could be agonisingly painful and even fatal[5].

Pilots were recommended not to engage in combat until they had used up the fuel in the rear tank. Part of the reason for this may have been the lack of manoeuvrability with a full load of fuel. However, it may also have been to reduce the risk of the pilot burning to death when his fuel tank was hit by enemy fire. Donald Moffat Wilson crashed his Spitfire Mk IX in the northern part of Brittany after flying across the English Channel from Cornwall, a distance of some 150 miles. This flight would have drained a significant part of the fuel from his rear tank. Nevertheless, on impact, the aircraft burst into flames and Donald died in the ensuing fire. The published record of RAF Fighter Command Losses suggests that he encountered flak (anti-aircraft fire from the ground)[4]. However, this is not mentioned in the squadron 165 Operations Record Book, which merely records that *P/O D. Moffat-Wilson crashed after the attack on a very large military convoy.* Nor is any flak mentioned by the eye witnesses on the ground Earlier in the same operation the group of four Spitfires had attacked and damaged a train at Guincamp area. This may have been where the flak was encountered.

After the loss


NICHOLSON ... Durham Light Infantry, the elder and dearly-loved son of Arthur and Evelyn Wheatley, of 84, Eastern-avenue, Reading, aged 24.

MISSING

CARLISLE.—Reported missing in June, 1944, in Italy, Lt. CHRISTOPHER A. CARLISLE, Coldstream Guards. Any information will be gratefully received by his parents, Capt. and Mrs. F. M. M. Carlisle, at Odstock Manor, Salisbury.

MOFFAT-WILSON.—Missing from recent air operations over enemy territory, Plt.-Offr. DONALD MOFFAT-WILSON, R.A.F., aged 21, younger son of the late Guy B. Moffat-Wilson and of Mrs. Moffat-Wilson, Albyn, Northchurch, Herts. Any information gratefully received.

IN MEMORIAM

"THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE"

ALDERWOOD, DEREK COLIN, Flg.-Offr., R.A.F.V.R.—In very proud and loving ... of our beloved DEREK on this his

The dramatic disappearance of Donald, just six days after the sudden death of his father Guy, must have been a tragic shock to his remaining family. An advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post,* on Wednesday 5th July 1944, records Donald as simply "missing" and asks for "any information gratefully received". It suggests that the Moffat Wilson family had no idea, even a month after his crash, whether he was alive or dead. At this time, the German occupation of northern France was still a reality, although Allied ground forces were advancing south towards Paris. Edith Moffat Wilson, who had just lost both her husband and younger son, was living with her twin daughters, Peggy and Beth, in Northchurch, Hertfordshire. The two girls, now aged 17, were working on local farms to help the war effort. They were devastated by the loss of their brother, who was just four years older than them. Peggy remembers

Donald as her favourite brother. Even today, she remembers his "brown eyes and thick brown hair".

Patrick Moffat Wilson, Donald's older brother, had a troubled life. He was a heavy drinker from the age of 18 and ended up in the British Army. The loss of his father and younger brother in June 1944 must have weighed heavily on his mind. Although he was a member of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, he had always wanted to join the RAF and when, in late 1944, he failed the exams to become a RAF Pilot, his depression became unbearable. He was found dead from a gunshot wound to the head on December 3, 1944, just six months after the death of his brother and father. He was 28 years old. He is buried in Wolverhampton Borough Cemetery.

In 1947, Edith, Donald's mother, returned to live in Ireland with her twin daughters, Peggy and Beth. They lived in a tiny rented flat in Cherryfield Avenue, Ranelagh on the south side of Dublin while Peggy trained as a Chartered Physiotherapist and Beth became a teacher. Edith died in 1953 of an aneurism and Beth died in 2003. Peggy is now the last surviving member of the Moffat-Wilson family. She lives with her husband, George Nairn, in a retirement home in Dublin.

Acknowledgements

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