

Boag

Nicholson, J.B

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY

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1-2-56

SHOT-DOWN AIRMAN HAD TO BE 'SAVED' FROM OWN SIDE

"Echo" Staff Reporter

THIS is the third and probably last chapter on "Where did the VC hero land?"

On January 19 the "Echo" stated that when Flight-Lieut. James B. Nicholson baled out from a Hurricane fighter after engaging in a battle which won him the first VC of the "Battle of Britain," he landed on the site of the new trading estate at Millbrook, Southampton, where a new factory has been built.

A reader wrote that our information was wrong, and that the fighter ace (who was killed in an air crash later in the war) came down a couple of hundred yards past the factory site, behind a group of three cottages on the main road to Totter.

FIRST ON SCENE

This is now backed up by Mr. Robert W. F. Stanley, of 1, Bellevue, Millbrook-road, who, as a member of the Home Guard, says he was first on the scene with a soldier and prevented other soldiers from firing at the pilot after he had landed.

The site is, as stated, 200 yards from the factory and about 130 yards on the Southampton side of Redbridge school, in a field behind a few old cottages.

Mr. Stanley was in Park-road, Southampton, at about noon on August 16, 1940, when he saw German and British fighters engaging one another in the clear, sunny skies above.

For 20 minutes there was "quite a mix-up," and he saw two planes fall towards the Isle of Wight. He also followed the course of two German fighters being chased in by a Hurricane. They circled towards Winchester, then turned towards the New Forest.

BALED OUT

One German dropped out of the fight, and while over the Coxford direction the Hurricane lost speed and height as smoke poured from it. The fighter nose-dived and a parachute billowed out.

Mr. Stanley, who was in Home Guard uniform, calculated that the pilot should come down near Redbridge. He commandeered a small green van and told the driver to "step on it."

"I did not know, of course, that the pilot was Flt.-Lieut. Nicholson," said Mr. Stanley, "but I was a bit worried because I had seen some tracer bullets going up towards the airman as he floated down. Someone was firing at the poor chap.

"Just before we got to the little school at Redbridge, we saw the pilot landing in a field on the left, behind some cottages. As I ran into the field, so did a soldier in slimsols and shirtsleeves."

WOUNDS AND BURNS

When they got to the airman, he was partly mixed up with his parachute, and was muttering dire threats against the troops who had

fired on him as he came down. He was badly wounded, and burned.

"The Home Guard were blamed for firing on him," said Mr. Stanley, "but I know it was the REs stationed at Sparshatt's Garage."

As the soldier and Home Guardsman released Flt.-Lieut. Nicholson from his parachute, and tried to make him comfortable on the grass, they heard yelling coming from the road.

Mr. Stanley said he saw a policeman followed by soldiers armed with rifles, and a crowd of civilians, rush in from a corner of the field. The soldiers were shouting and pointing their rifles towards the airman and the two men in khaki who were trying to aid him.

Running towards the police officer, Mr. Stanley shouted "Stop! He's one of ours." The policeman turned, threw up his arms, and stopped the "attack."

TAKEN TO HOSPITAL

Flt.-Lieut. Nicholson was taken to the Royal South Hants Hospital. His wounds included shots he received from men who fired on him as he floated towards the earth, says Mr. Stanley.

A native of Hampstead, Flt.-Lieut. (afterwards Wing Commander) Nicholson was a flight commander in 249 Squadron, RAF, when shot down over Southampton.

Southampton

Echo 1.2.1956.

ROADS CROSSING DANGEROUS

to the airman's assistance. After the publication of Mr. Stanley's story he had a call from Mr. E. A. Dukes, of Rothsay, Redbridge-road, Millbrook—the 1940 soldier, who is now a driver for Hobbs the Printers.

During the Battle of Britain Mr. Dukes was on leave from the RASC after his evacuation from St. Nazaire in a fishing trawler.

Sprint in the dark

THE solidly-built figure of one of Southampton's most respected townspeople broke into a run. He had caught sight of a rival on a power-bike. Sprinting through the darkness of early-morning Southampton he arrived panting at the door.

EVANS, of the Department of the Director in British Columbia, is one of the 600 teachers in British Columbia who are to be appointed to secondary schools with a salary range of £700 to £1,600, to experience and qualifications.

Evans will be in England from March 31 and will visit more than 15 provincial centres for interviews, in addition to London. He hopes to secure not more than 100 suitable teachers and more if he can get them. Last year 60 teachers were appointed to British Columbia schools; all have settled in well. Educational problems in British Columbia, because of the phenomenal expansion, are even more acute than in Britain.

Meeting at Millbrook

TWO men met in a field at Millbrook, Southampton, on a sunny day in August, 1940. They were the first on the scene when Flt.-Lieut. J. B. Nicholson baled out from a Hurricane fighter after taking part in a battle which won him the VC.

Recent references to this incident in the "Echo" were instrumental in bringing these two men together again for the first time for over 15 years. And they found that all this time they had been living within a stone's throw of each other.

Mr. R. W. F. Stanley, of 1, Bellevue, Millbrook-road, Southampton, told us of "the other man"—a soldier in plimsolls and shirtsleeves—who went with him

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16th NOV 1965

V.C. riddle—clue of the .303 cartridges

RECENT discussions in the "Echo" Letterbox about Flight-Lieut. James B. Nicholson, who baled out of his Hurricane over Redbridge, Southampton, have revived an incident that has been on the mind of Mr. Robert W. F. Stanley, a contractor, of 1, Bellevue, Millbrook-road, Southampton. Mr. Stanley was on the scene when Flight-Lieut. Nicholson—who earned the first VC of the Battle of Britain—came down following a battle with two Me 110s.

.303 CLUE

"I saw tracers going up and they were coming from the REs' base and from the Canadians at the Docks. I found 11 recently fired .303 cases in that field near Redbridge School and the Home Guard did not fire .303s.

"When a group of REs came running into the field they were going to shoot the airman. I ran towards them shouting: 'No, he's one of ours,' and a police officer who was with them helped to calm them down."

Mr. Stanley, a lance-corporal in the Home Guard, visited Flight-Lieut. Nicholson, who had 50 or 60 pieces of metal taken out of his body.

"It was his wish that I should not press the matter of who had fired," Mr. Stanley said. "He felt all the bullets were fired by mistake and by our own men."

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