

Karel Pavlik & Circus 157

Sequence of events on the 5 May 1942 1441 hours.

313 (Czechoslovak) Squadron took off from Fairlop. **Sergeant Karel Pavlik** (Czech) Blue section, in Spitfire BM 361.

1443 hours.

122 (Bombay) Squadron commanded by **Squadron Leader František Fajtl** (Czech) took off from Hornchurch, also

Flight Sergeant Stacey Jones (British) Yellow section, in Spitfire MT-A BM 404;

Flight Lieutenant Baudouin de Hemptinne (Belgian) Blue section, Spitfire MT-T BM 321, also in Blue section was **Sergeant Roland Joffre Ribaut** (Canadian), Spitfire MT-N BM 138.

1530 hours.

The Bostons reached Lille, but due to the cloud cover could not drop their bombs. They turned to fly back to England, accompanied by the 12 Spitfires of 64 Squadron, and all landed safely at their home airfields in Swanton Morley and Hornchurch around 1630 hours.

At the same time, however, 313 and 122 Squadron were attacked by 15 FW 190s coming at them from the direction of St. Omer, about 2,000 feet above and behind the Spitfires.

At the same time, 6 more FW 190s fired at the Spitfires from the easterly direction of Oostend. Fierce dog fighting ensued between the 24 Spitfires of the 122 and 313 Squadrons and the 21 FW 190s, with tragic consequences.

1550 hours.

Operation Circus 157 comes to a tragic culmination above a small area of Belgian Heuvelland (hill country) near the Kemmelberg (Mt. Kemmel), in the vicinity of the small towns of Dranouter and Poperinghe, not far from the town of Ypres, and at the French border near Nieuwkerke.

Local people had to hide in safety of cellars or houses, frightened by the low flying fighting aircraft and rain of machine gun bullets and canon shells and of course falling debris. However, there were many eye witnesses of the events.

It took only 20 minutes of aerobatics and dog fighting in which four lives were lost with several more pilots returning to their airfields wounded or with badly damaged aircraft.



Top L: S/Ldr Fajtl **R:** F/L Hemptinne

Bottom L: F/Sgt Jones **R:** Sgt Ribout

The Spitfire of **F/Sgt Stacey Jones** was hit by enemy fire after the initial clash between the Spitfires and the Focke-Wulfs. His plane nose dived and crashed in the front garden of a house on Provensteenweg near Poperinghe. The pilot did not survive the impact.

Sgt Roland Joffre Ribout in Blue Section of the 122 Squadron was attacked by two Focke-Wulfs. Four witnesses on the ground watched him bail out from his stricken Spitfire at the height of about 2,000ft. His parachute stayed shut, or perhaps his aircraft was too low for the parachute to open and Roland jumped to his death.

Squadron Leader František Fajtl was the only one of the five shot down pilots to survive a crash landing. He left the crash site within 10 minutes of landing and managed to flee through France, across the Pyrenees, via jail in Spain back to the UK.

He shot down 2 enemy aircraft before he was forced to land with his damaged aircraft in the field near the village of Hardifort by Cassel in Northern France, with the engine of his Spitfire burning and his aircraft riddled by enemy fire.

After landing, he was given civilian clothes by a French woman plucking grass for her rabbits nearby, and started his 3 months escape odyssey. He finally landed in Portreath, UK, on 20 August 1942 on his 30th birthday. He rejoined the RAF and went on to become a Czech Spitfire legend after the war! A milkman and a farmer saw a trail of black smoke when the aircraft crashed. It was not until May 1945, that the Missing Research and Inquiry Service together with CWGC finally lifted the wrecked aircraft from the compact clay, with the pilot still strapped in his cockpit.



24 year old Sgt Karel Pavlik

It appears he was shot through the head and probably died before his Spitfire reached the ground. The pilot's body was perfectly preserved by the dense soil of the Flanders Fields.



The Crash site in 1942

Now identified Sgt Karel Pavlík was buried with full military honours in Ypres Town Extension CWGC cemetery a few

days later alongside his fellow fighter pilots killed in Operation Circus 157. The Merlin engine of his Spitfire remained in a thick layer of clay until 1997, when it was recovered by [Groep Huyghe-Decuyper](#), local aircraft archeologists, who also traced Sgt Pavlík's sister and the family in Czechoslovakia, who after 52 years, finally informed of the location of Sgt Pavlík's grave.

5 May 2011

On 5 May 2011, *Lest We Forget* tours arranged a visit to the crash sites and Ypres Town Extension Cemetery. Later wreaths were laid during a moving ceremony at the Menin Gate.



The graves of the four killed during Circus 157. The gap is where Flight Lieutenant Baudouin de Hemptinne was buried originally but his body was exhumed and reburied in the Belgian Military Cemetery



**Anny, Carole and Katherine at the crash site on Kemmel Hill.
(Anny passed away in 2012)**



Memorial to Karel Pavlik with his crash site in the background.



Piece of wreckage presented to David Martin by Wim Huyghes.



Karel's Merlin engine in the garage of Wim Huyghes: l-r Anny (sister), Ketherine (grandaughter), Carole (daughter) and Wim on extreme right.

Missing Research and Enquiry Unit (MREU)

In the immediate period after the war it was evident that all former enemy territory in Europe would need to be searched for missing RAF aircrew. This would be an arduous task looking for unburied remains in wrecks, buried unknown casualties or anomalies with existing burials, where recorded names or dates made little sense when compared to RAF records.

To judge the mammoth task faced by MREU, is the fact that by 8 May 1945 there were over 40,000 RAF casualties in northern Europe. At the end of the work, 20,547 casualties remained unaccounted.

Body Recovery

On 15 July 1945 Flying Officer Vivian Oury of Missing Research and Enquiry Unit (MREU) attended the village of Dranoutre, near Ypres, and recovered a body at a depth of 21 feet 6 inches (6.5 Metres), amongst severely damaged remains of a cockpit. The body was well preserved, probably due to the heavy clay sub soil in which the aircraft was imbedded. No documents or identity disc was found and there was evidence of fire, small holes burnt into the RAF type battledress.

Other objects found included:
An assortment of aircraft parts and equipment (with serial numbers), which could be used for identification,



Anny and Carole at the Menin Gate.



David Martin lays a wreath on the grave of Karel Pavlik.

including a MKII 20mm cannon and propeller.

Personal objects found:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Chromium cigarette case inscribed 'Js MCD'. Engraved inside 'Jackson Trophy 1939' (believed to be a rowing trophy) | 3) Large wrist watch stopped at 1608 hours |
| 2) Cigarette lighter 'ORLIK SPORT' made in London | 4) Part of flying glove silk lining bearing number 787431 in ink |
| 7) A leather purse containing:
3 Czechoslovakian coins,
1 Palestinian copper coin,
2 half crowns
1 two shilling piece 9)
2 sixpences
6 half pennies
1 farthing | 5) Stainless steel pen knife
6) Small ivory elephant slightly charred. |
| 8) Key chain and ring to which was attached:
1 Yale key marked with 'Ron' scratched on one side
1 Yale drawer key
1 trinket box type key
15 x 100 French francs
8 x 50 francs
10 x 10 French francs | |

An attempt was made to identify the aircraft using unintelligible painted letters on the twisted fuselage, concluding that the first letter might be 'B' and the second either 'K', 'N' or 'K'. The body was put in a coffin and placed in the communal vault at Ypres, pending identification, as there was no suitable vault at Dranoutre.

Whilst containing much graphic detail, it illustrates the challenges faced by recovery teams when confusing clues are unearthed. In this instance the cigarette case with initials 'Js McD' or someone known as 'Ron' may have indicated a British casualty. These clues proved to be red herrings.

There were two significant clues: the known date of the crash, 5 May 1942 and the number 787431 on the flying glove silk liners. (perhaps the origin of the family tradition.)

Both details provided Air Ministry Casualty Branch P.4 (Cas) with a perfect match – that of Karel Pavlik.

Grateful thanks are due to the following for compilation of this Fact File:

Dirk Decuypere, Wim Huyghes, Milena Kolarikova, Chris Locke and RAF Missing Research and Enquiry Unit.

Recorder, Thursday, December 16, 2010 www.iffordrecorder.co.uk www.woodfordrecorder.co.uk www.soughtonrecorder.co.uk

MEMORIAL FOR TRAGIC AIRMAN CAME FROM DISTANT RELATIVE



Truth behind pilot tribute is revealed

THE mystery of a memorial placed to remember a pilot killed during a flight back to Fairlop Waters during the Second World War has been solved.

A cross with a poppy was laid in the clubhouse at the country park off

By ZJAN SHIRINIAN

ONE OF THE most poignant of all

Former Royal, Barkingside, in July in memory of Karel Pavlik.

The only clue to who had placed the

cross were the words "Radice" (meaning

family) and "Milena", plus a hand-written

note explaining the former sergeant had

died in May 1942 in a Spitfire crash.

Investigation by Fairlop Heritage

Group (FHG) chairman David Martin

found Karel, of 212 squadron, was shot

and killed as he flew in his Spitfire escort-

ing British bombers.

The Czech airman's Spitfire crashed

11km south-west of Ypres, Belgium.

After an appeal on the FHG's website,

the woman who had come to the UK to

lay the cross – Milena Kolarikova – came

forward.

The Prague-born woman, who now lives

with her husband in Ypres, is a distant

relative of Karel.

Mr Martin, who has exchanged emails

with Milena, said: "I'm absolutely

delighted to have found out who placed

the cross here."

He added: "It was a complete surprise.

"The trouble is, about 10 squadrone flew

from Fairlop so it's virtually impossible to

find out about each one.

"I produced a DVD about Fairlop and I

told Milena 'I don't know who to include

Karel because I can't miss him out."

Karel's body was recovered in 1945

after a failed attempt to do so the previous

year.

He is buried with three other pilots killed

on the same day – Bohdan Radzinski, de

Herpington, a Czechman killed after being

and Douglas Shaggy Jones from the UK.

In 1947, the Spitfire engine was found

buried 'too deep in clay at the crash site.

A memorial was later erected nearby.



TRIBUTE: Milena Kolarikova at the memorial and the cross for Karel Pavlik

1,790 **13** **2** **23** **25,000** **345,000**

men and women who served in Fairlop during both world wars

– the number of countries whose personnel served at Fairlop in both world wars

Czechs known to have died during missions which originated at the RAF station in Fairlop

people who served at Fairlop during both world wars died in battle

members of the Czech collaboration military lost their lives during World War Two

Czech civilians who died during World War Two

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