

News Extra, GALLIMAUFRY

The Galloway News, Thursday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1993

Spitfire finally recovered from burial site

Search and recovery filmed by BBC

By Alan Phin

A Spitfire called Blue Peter, which crashed in the Carsphairn hills during the last war, was finally recovered by helicopter on Monday thanks to a 'News' reader.

Members of the Dumfries Aviation Group had been searching the hills at the request of the Blue Peter BBC television programme for the site where the plane had been buried without success when chairman David Reid appealed through the 'News' for help.

There was an immediate response from several readers including Jim Bell who remembered being taken to the crash site by his father, a shepherd on Craiengillan, when he was a 14-year-old schoolboy, Jim, now a semi retired shepherd who lives near Kilmarnock, was with group members when they finally found the burial site beside the Bow Burn on Wednesday, June 23, 51 years to the day when the plane crashed.

Since then the Dumfries Aviation Group members have been spending their spare time freeing the fusillage, including its Rolls Royce Merlin engine, from the bog where it was buried. The wings were apparently salvaged after the crash and the remainder of the wreckage simply buried as it was in too isolated a spot to be recovered.

Jim was also at the crash site on Monday when a Royal Navy helicopter from 819 Squadron stationed at Prestwick transported the wreckage in several lifts to a lorry near the Drumjohn hydro electric station north of Carsphairn. From there the engine and airframe were taken by road to the group's workshops on the former RAF station at Dumfries. There it is planned to use some of the parts as a pattern to help complete a similar Spitfire the group recovered from Loch Doon some 10 years ago.

BBC cameras have been recording the search and recovery for the Blue Peter programme and possibly a short documentary. The plane was named Blue Peter after a famous racehorse when it was presented by the town of Newmarket to the RAF during the early days of the war.

One of the first people to help the group was Jim McGarva who had been ditching on the Holm of Dalquairn when the plane crashed. He went to the aid of the pilot who landed by parachute but died from his injuries before help could be summoned. Mr McGarva, who now lives in Patna, was unable to take to the hills and point out the site due to failing health.

During research by the group it was learned that the pilot was 19-year old David Hunter-Blair, a brother of Sir Edward Hunter-Blair, who now lives at Parton, and a cousin of Frank Hunter-Blair, who has farmed Marbrack – a few miles west of the crash site – since the 1950's.

The pilot was a member of 242 Squadron station at RAF Ayr and on the crash day was part of a screen protecting the passage of the Queen Mary up the Clyde with some of the first American troops to arrive in Britain during the war.

The crash was thought to have been caused by the pilot losing consciousness due to oxygen failure. It was assumed he came too in time to jump clear of the diving plane seconds later before the crash but was too near the ground for his parachute to open fully.

Photo captions;

1. The Royal Navy helicopter lowers the Spitfire engine on to the trailer at Drumjohn after air lifting it over the hills from the burial site near Moorbroch hill.
2. Bob McKay from Lockerbie, a member of Dumfries Aviation Group, secures the Rolls Royce Merlin engine to the trailer.