

## World War Two plane crashes near Tickhill

While outside during playtime at Bircotes Junior School on 10 May 1944 Norman Jessop and fellow pupils saw a twin tailed Lockheed Lightning plane (similar to the one pictured) flying low with smoke trailing from an engine. They clearly saw the pilot bail out and watched the plane crash to the east of Tickhill. It was 'just about the best crash we had ever seen' Norman recalled, admitting it was the only crash he had witnessed at that stage. For the youngsters the spectacle was a talking point for weeks and the crash site by a piggery at the end of Backlands Lane (not far from the present day motorway bridge at the end of Sunderland Street) was a source of mementoes.



Norman's cousin, Ted Tissington, has in recent years found out how the USAAF plane came to be in this area and why it crashed, one of many planes to come down over England as a result of accidents rather than enemy action. He has also found out more details of the pilot's future career. The plane took off from an airfield at Goxhill about 10 miles north-west of Immingham. From 1 December 1942 this former RAF base was home to the Americans and known as the 8th Air Force Station code name F-345 and was a base for training pilots to fly P38 Lockheed Lightnings and P51 Mustangs. The facilities at the airfield were very basic with a

brick built control tower, wooden barracks and Nissen huts. Piloted by 23 year old 2nd Lt Lee William Anderson, the Lockheed Lightning plane, with several others, took off on 10 May at about 10 a.m. on a mission to practice cine-gunnery, single engine operation and homing. Anderson's plane developed problems early in the mission as he recorded in a detailed accident report:

...Shortly after I had taken off I noticed a gas syphoning from my right wing-tip. I immediately switched to my wing-tip tanks and called the fellow alongside of me that I was pulling out of formation to do some manoeuvres to stop the syphoning. This did not work so then I turned my selector switch to main wing tanks and tried more manoeuvres. This seemed to have stopped it. Lt Coates and I started our camera gunnery. My gun sight was out so Lt Coates fired on me. He finished firing so we joined into formation and saw a Lancaster a little ahead and below us. We dropped down and flew formation for about [left blank] minutes and started South and West of Base to practice some homings. My right engine back-fired twice, violent enough to knock my right throttle back a little. Right after this the cock-pit filled full of smoke and I could not see anything, so I dropped the canopy. I called Mayday three times and gave a count to five and said that I was bailing out. Both engines were still running as I didn't have to hold any rudder to keep directional control. I stuck my head out to get fresh air and check the motors. I saw that it was the right motor smoking so I cut throttle mixture and hit feathering switch and trimmed ship still having to hold a little left rudder. I had then decided to stay with plane. Lt Coates said that the prop was full-feathered but I was unable to see it. The Control Tower then called me back and I called and gave him my compass direction, altitude, and call number. By this time the fire had burned a hole in the top of the right engine cowl and flames were coming out and getting very close to the wing. This I noticed when I stuck my head out again for air. I decided then to bail out. The ship was under control so I pulled the nose up to dissipate some speed and then started to get out. The window wouldn't either turn or push down with ratchet in either position so I went over the top. By the time I had gotten out the plane was nearly on its back because when I released the rudder pressure the plane started banking. Lee W Anderson 2nd Lt., Air Corps 0-756436

Further records show the pilot bailed out at c3,500 feet at 10.52 a.m. Visibility was good at 3,000-3,500 yards. The plane was completely destroyed (some of the wreckage shown right). The P38s, cast-offs from front line squadrons, were prone to engines catching fire after losing components such as connecting rods; 31 P38s from Goxhill were lost in accidents with 13 pilots killed and 4 injured. Not until May 1944 did the base have ground crew who were sufficiently proficient in maintenance. Moreover the young pilots (average age 20-21) only had a few hours flying training on the P38s. Lt Anderson had had just over 2 hours flying this model of aircraft, but over 54 hours flying time in the previous 90 days.



In many ways it is remarkable that Lt Anderson survived WW2. In July 1944 while with 55 Fighter Squadron he had a taxiing accident at King's Cliffe, Northants, when his P38J plane was hit by another plane, then on 10 August 1944 he had to bail out over Belgium. He was wingman to a Capt E W Hower who reported that his Mustang had low oil pressure. He was ordered to return to base but Anderson had to bail out. His parachute was seen to land in a woodland clearing near Epioux, Belgium. Hower circled but could not see Anderson. His report was annotated 'prisoner concentration point Bruxelles 14.8.44'. However, a report was written by Anderson in London, dated 13 September 1944, saying that when his parachute landed he hid for 10 days after being helped by the Resistance to evade capture. After discharge Anderson returned to his birthplace, Stanley, North Dakota, before moving to Novato, California in 1962. He died in 1980 aged 59.

Anderson's plane was not the only wartime plane to crash near Tickhill: on 18 September 1942 at 00.40 hours a Vickers Wellington BJ976 took off from the Operational Training Unit at RAF Bircotes on a training flight for night time bombing practice. At 01.30 the plane returned but was seen to climb away from the runway - it had possibly overshoot it - and then crashed near Tickhill killing all four crew members, the pilot Sgt George Nicol age 22, navigator Sgt Wilfred Bales age 31, bomb aimer Sgt John Charles Dalton age 23 and wireless operator/air gunner Sgt Percy Benjamin Elliott Woodham age 21.

Kelly, D. H., *They too served: 496th Fighter Training Group 1943-45*, Air Command and Staff College Wright Flyer Paper No.: 13, 2001. Can be found at website <<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA407465>>  
Some details of Anderson's military career are given in website <[www.americanairmuseum.com/person/144005](http://www.americanairmuseum.com/person/144005)>  
<<http://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk>> for details of the 1942 crash.