

John Cornwell, who lived at Farleigh House Farm, remembers that from his windows he could see the huge fires burning in the furthest field before Frylands Wood during night raids. He recalls seeing six or seven large circular oil tanks (about the size of two large rooms) which stood about waist high, which would be lit two or three at a time, different ones each time and not on every raid to avoid giving the game away. The tanks would have had shallow firebreak trenches around them to stop the fires spreading to where they were not required. His recollection of where he saw these tanks agrees with the official grid reference quoted in Colin Dobinson's *Fields of Deception* – TQ375610 – which places it near the head of the valley called Farleigh Dean, south-west of Frylands Wood. It did not matter if the ground surface was level as the lights and fires were designed to be visible by night from several thousand feet above.

The Farleigh decoy had a small military staff whose job was to set off the fires once a raid had begun and then dive for cover into a nearby shelter.

Police Constable Arthur Battle was based at Kenley Police Station during the war, and Farleigh was part of his beat. His unpublished memoirs, entitled *This Job's Not Like It Used To Be* (some extracts of which appeared in *Local History Records* Vol.36) also include a reference to the decoy airfield. He writes that even the police knew very little about its existence, and when a civilian lorry driver carrying a large load of oil barrels stopped him in Selsdon and asked the way to the 'So-and-So Film Company at Farleigh' he couldn't help him. Only when the driver asked him if there was anywhere in Farleigh which would use large quantities of oil did the penny drop, and he directed him to the dummy airfield.

The Farleigh decoy proved itself useful in the night air-raids that took place in the winter of 1940-41 and, according to *Fields of Deception*, the busiest period after this was in the 'Little Blitz', which took place in March 1944. Farleigh was the busiest Starfish around this time, being lit once in January, three times in March, and again in April. On the night of 24/25 March it was showered with incendiary and phosphorus bombs.

There would have been some sort of solidly-built control and generator building on the site and an air-raid shelter, but I believe that they are long gone, and the only other likely evidence on the ground would be the firebreak trenches. The vast amount of earth-moving that

took place when the golf course was built in Farleigh in the 1990s would have destroyed any such evidence, should it have survived until then.

Kenley airfield was also served by lighting and/or small fire decoys at Woldingham, South Godstone and Walton Heath.

SOURCES:

Battle, Arthur. *This Job's Not Like It Used To Be*, kept in the Metropolitan Police Museum

Cornwell, John, resident of Farleigh, to whom I give my thanks

Dobinson, Colin (2000) *Fields of Deception* published by Methuen

R.A.F. STATION KENLEY – 1940

by Jim Crofts MBE, AE

WHEN I AM ASKED 'Did you take part in the Battle of Britain?'. I usually reply 'Yes, but I did not know it 'til it was all over.'

I was a 19-year old Scot who had never spent much time away from my home town of Forfar, in the heart of Angus, when in early 1940 I joined the Royal Air Force and found myself with two other lads from the north posted to Royal Air Force Kenley. Alighting at Whyteleafe railway station, wearing full kit and carrying our gas masks, tin hats and kitbags, we were informed, by what appeared to be the only official on duty, that the way to Kenley was 'past the church and up the hill'. Off we set on foot to ascend what seemed to us, laden down like pack horses, an endless climb. Exhausted, we eventually arrived at the guardroom to the airfield where we found, contrary to the usual confusion with RAF postings, we were expected.

After depositing our kit in the billets we had been allocated, which turned out to be the married quarters occupied by the regular staff prior to hostilities, we reported to the Sector Operations Room where, as Clerks [Special Duty], we were to spend what turned out to be the most exciting months of our young lives.

Being young and far from home is always a difficult time in one's life but I found Kenley, with its proud pre-war record, to be a most friendly station. Even today, as I attend the annual reunions, there is a certain magic about the place and the feeling that I am returning home.

The Operations Room, which, alas, was demolished some years ago, was situated behind the Officers' Mess and was manned around the clock by three watches of WAAFs and airmen. It was from here that the aerial battle in our part of south-east England was directed. The enemy was only too aware of the vital part Kenley, together with Biggin Hill, Tangmere and the other four Sector Stations in No.11 Group of Fighter Command, were playing in the destruction of his battle fleet during its campaign to secure air superiority – an essential prerequisite to his plans to invade our homeland. Kenley's success rate, although achieved at great cost in human lives, was extremely high. So on Sunday 18 August 1940, the enemy decided that this airfield should be made the object of a direct attack to destroy all the key facilities and render the airfield non-operational for some time to come.

I had been on duty in the Ops.Room overnight and, after breakfast, attended at the Station Sick Quarters at 11.15am for dental treatment. I had not been there long before the message came over the Tannoy system, 'Attack Alarm, Attack Alarm. All personnel not servicing aircraft take cover'. This broadcast came from the Ops.Room when enemy aircraft were in close proximity. The Sick Quarters building was immediately evacuated and I joined my colleagues outside the covered slit trench which was directly behind our billets.

We were enjoying a chat and a smoke outside the shelter as we had done in the past weeks for, although there was plenty of air activity, nothing much up to now had happened. However, on this day, not many minutes had elapsed before we realised we were being attacked by machine gun and cannon shell fire as three Dornier aircraft, at low level, flew over the rooftops of our billets. There was a mad scramble to get underground and from then on, all hell let loose.

Our trench had a near miss at one end and a few of our colleagues were partially buried. However, no serious casualties were sustained and we emerged into the daylight about 1 pm to survey the damage.

The sick quarters where I had been earlier was in flames and the shelter adjacent to this building had received a direct hit where, we learned later, three of our Medical Officers had been killed, including a well-known local physician. Of the seven hangars on the airfield, only one remained intact and a pall of smoke hung over the area. Strangely, although communications were severely damaged, the Operations Room had not been hit but it was decided that the building should be abandoned and staff transferred to the 'Emergency Operations Room'

which had been constructed inside a converted butcher's shop in Caterham-in-the-Valley, owned pre-war by Messrs Spice and Wallis. This move took place at the beginning of September, and operations were conducted from this building until November when a house at Old Coulsdon, known as 'The Grange', was taken over and converted to meet operational requirements. Incidentally, I was on duty in the old butcher's shop Ops.Room on the evening when we were visited by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. I recall, too, that on many occasions, Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, C.in C. Fighter Command, spent the evening with us.



The former butcher's shop at 11 Godstone Road, Caterham that served as an emergency operations room for RAF Kenley in 1940. The photograph was taken after the shop had been acquired by E Reeves in 1947.

From RAF Kenley by Peter Flint

I left Kenley in March 1941 as a member of the crew manning the radar station at Wartling on the marshes east of Eastbourne and I came back after the war, to settle in this lovely town.

I am now 83 years of age and until quite recently have attended the Kenley reunion of all those who were on duty on the airfield on Sunday 18 August 1940, the day of the big raid. During the service which is held at 'Airmens' Corner' in St Luke's Churchyard, Whyteleafe, where those killed on the airfield on that fateful day were laid to rest, my mind goes back over the years and I find that the months I spent at Royal Air Force Kenley in 1940, which proved to be one of the most momentous periods in our great and glorious history, are still vivid in my memory.