

The Goodwin Sands Education Project

World War II

In the summer of 1940 during World War II (1939-1945) the skies above the Goodwins saw lots of dog fights between British and German planes. This was because there were many airfields along the coast of Kent and the Germans were coming over to bomb London and the south coast.

As a result of this, there are lots of crashed WWII aircraft lying scattered around the Sands - Spitfires, Hurricanes, Messerschmitts, Junker 88s, Dornier 17s and others. There are also some huge American B17 bombers from when the United States entered the war. Several of these crash sites have been found by local divers and in 2013 a whole Dornier 17 was brought up from the seabed for conservation.

One young British pilot who died here was Pilot Officer Keith Gillman. Keith was born in December 1920 in a village called River just outside Dover. He went to the County School for Boys, which is now Dover Grammar School, and left in 1938. He joined the RAF in March 1939; his first mission was in June 1940 and in July he destroyed a Messerschmitt 109 over the English Channel.

A local newspaper published a story about Keith landing his plane on a road in River so he could pay a surprise visit to his parents. The actual story was that his Hurricane had been damaged in a dog fight with a Messerschmitt and he had crash landed at RAF Hawkinge, near Folkestone. He then went by road to see his parents though the visit was still probably a surprise.

Tragically, just one month later he was shot down in his Hurricane P2755 and was last seen three miles off the coast of Dover. Pilots were issued with packs of fluorescein, a greenish-yellow dye in powdered form, to sew on their life jackets.



In the sea this would create a significant stain around the pilot to attract the attention of searching aircraft. Unfortunately, Gillman either did not use it or it didn't work. He was reported 'Missing'. He was just 19 years old. His body was never found.

One week after his death a photograph of Keith Gillman in his flying helmet and goggles was published on the front page of a magazine called *Picture Post*. This must have been very hard on his family.

Keith Gillman is commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial, the memorial at River and on the Battle of Britain memorials in London and at Capel-le-Ferne near Folkestone. A lifelike bronze statue of Keith Gillman and six brother RAF officers was unveiled at the Kent Battle of Britain Museum in 2021. It shows them all relaxing on the grass and was copied from a photograph taken of them in July 1940. Keith Gillman is third from the left and was the only one of these seven men not to survive the war.



After his death, Keith's parents donated the Keith Gillman Memorial Cup to the Dover Lifeguards to be given as an annual swimming trophy in his memory. The first race held in 1956 was presented to the winner by Flight Lieutenant R E Jones, himself one of the brave pilots who flew during the Battle of Britain, known as 'The Few'.



Today, One of Keith Gillman's family descendants is a volunteer at The Kent Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge near Folkestone, thereby continuing the family association with the airfield.



Activity: Write the newspaper report commemorating (celebrating/ remembering) Keith Gillman's life.

Use the information above and research and report on:

- Who Keith was
- What he did
- Where he lived / where he worked as a pilot
- What happened to him in life as a pilot
- How his life has been celebrated after his death
- Why it's important we commemorate (remember) his life



www.goodwinsands.org.uk