

Uninvited Guests at Sculthorpe

The contractors were just on the point of completing the aerodrome at Tattersett/Sculthorpe when the first visitors arrived on May 15th 1943. 3 US B17s 'Fireball' from the 351bg from Polebrook returned, badly shot up and with one fatality, from a raid on an airfield near St. Omer in France. This was followed by a 'Hell's Angel' with one dead and three wounded, a third had no casualties.

As it was an active site (it had just opened) it seemed a good place to make an emergency landing. The aircraft were cleared away by a contractor's bulldozer. The fatality on 'Fireball' was the tail-gunner who had bailed out in panic and whose chute had become entangled on the tail plane. He was found to be dead on arrival. 'Hell's Angel' was in a poor state when it landed, as well as having casualties on board it also had an engine out and a large hole in the port wing.

By coincidence less than a year later contractors were again on Sculthorpe when a Beaufighter from the pilot's pool from Bircham Newton had engine trouble and, seeing the work going on, elected to land in a nearby field only to discover later that it was full of bulldozers! Not long after this, a Mustang from Bentwaters which had been in a collision flew into the ground near the building being used by the contractors for administration, which concentrated the minds of those who were working in them.

During the War it was not unusual for Allied aircraft to call in unannounced from time to time and in the days of NATO visitors would call in although prior notice would be given if possible. One day during the 1980s this arrangement did not work. One evening, possibly in 1983, an SR71 Blackbird landed at Sculthorpe. A member of the public was in his car in a layby, minus his camera which had been confiscated by MPs, reported that there was also a B52. It was probably a late variant of a KC135 which were used as tankers for SR71s. Both left after a short while. Quite what they were doing there is not clear, Sculthorpe had no remit to handle an SR71 and had no facilities to do so. This never happened again.