



## Fairlop's 20th Century Heroes of the Air

### Fairlop's Zeppelin Hero

#### Alfred de Bathe Brandon and Zeppelin L33



Lieutenant Alfred de Bathe Brandon, a New Zealander, was commander of C Flight, No. 39 (Home Defence) Squadron based at Hainault Farm. He was one of the pilots who played an important role in defending Britain during the night of 23rd/24th September 1916, when a number of enemy Zeppelins crossed the coast of England. These included new Super Zeppelins. They flew from German occupied Belgium to attack London and coastal ports. The incident was reported in a number of ways, including official log books, national newspapers and private letters.

#### Lieutenant Alfred de Bathe Brandon

(John Barfoot)

Lieutenant Brandon describes in his log book how he took off in the dark just before midnight, to pursue the Zeppelins. His eventual target was Zeppelin L33 with a crew of 22. It was already partially disabled having been hit by Britain's anti-aircraft guns. Zeppelin L33 continued to lose height despite jettisoning water ballast and machine guns.



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Just after 12p.m. Lieutenant Brandon gained on the German airship and flew alongside, firing at its flank. Using new, improved ammunition he managed to pierce the airship's gas filled "ballonet" sections. This caused more damage to the Zeppelin. However, before Lieutenant Brandon could make another attack from above using incendiary rockets, the airship disappeared into the dark. It was heading towards Mersea Island and out into the Channel but its commander, Captain Bocker gave the order to turn the airship back over dry land. He realised it was too damaged to make a safe journey back home across the Channel.

The L33 crashed into a farmer's field at Little Wigborough, Essex. The Germans survived and set fire to the Zeppelin in an attempt to keep its design a secret from the British. As a result, one of the crew was badly burnt. They surrendered to a special constable and were taken to Colchester as prisoners. The next day sightseers and newspaper reporters flocked to Little Wigborough to see the closely guarded crash scene. Visitors to Little Wigborough Church can still see small pieces of metalwork salvaged from the stricken Zeppelin.

See: <http://www.essex.police.uk/museum/historynotebooks/7.pdf>

It was thanks to the on-going improvements in British weapons and aircraft design, and the bravery of men like Lieutenant Brandon, that Germany realised Zeppelins no longer guaranteed them supremacy over the sky.