

Billy Fiske

**The first American to fight for the RAF in the 'Battle of Britain'.
Based at Tangmere flying Hurricanes, he lived briefly at Chidmere and
was killed in August 1940.**

Billy Fiske was born in New York in 1911. He was educated in Chicago, as well as France and Cambridge University.

As driver of the first five-man U.S. Bobsled team to win the Olympics, Fiske became the youngest gold medalist in the sport, aged just 16 years at the 1928 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland. He again won gold in 1932 at the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

Fiske, the son of a wealthy banker, worked at the London office of Dillon, Reed & Co, the New York bankers, spending his summers in America, and winters in Britain and Europe.

He learnt to fly at an aerodrome near London and married Rose, the former Countess of Warwick, at Maidenhead in 1938.

Early in 1939 Billy was recalled to his firm's New York office shortly before England declared war on Germany on 3 September. But an English friend who was working in New York was an RAF reservist and together they sailed back to England on the Aquitania on 30 August, and Billy joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Billy was one of 10 US pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain, although due to the neutrality of the United States, he pretended to be a Canadian.

After training, on the 12 July 1940 he joined No. 601 Squadron who flew Hurricanes based at Tangmere. This was the so-called Millionaire's Squadron. At that time Chidmere House was empty – the residents had been evacuated, and Billy was able to rent it. Thus, for but a very brief time, he became a resident of Chidham. However, much of his time would have been spent at Tangmere.

On 14 July Fiske had his first flight with the squadron, and on 20 July flew his first operational sortie. Over the next 27 days he flew 42 operations, often flying several times each day. For example, on 8 August he flew four sorties, totalling 5 hours and 20 minutes in the air, protecting convoys in the English Channel off the Isle of Wight.

On 16 August, in the midst of the Battle of Britain, Fiske flew two operations. On the second his squadron was scrambled to intercept a squadron of German dive-bombers. His aircraft was damaged, but rather than abandon it he chose to try and bring the valuable and much-needed Hurricane home. As he approached Tangmere, the aircraft caught fire. Fiske landed safely, but received severe burns. He was taken to Royal West Sussex Hospital (now St. Richard's Hospital) Chichester, where it seemed he would recover quickly. However, on 17 August Pilot Officer Fiske died of shock. He was buried at Boxgrove. He was 29 years old.



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Hurricanes at Tangmere



Hawker Hurricane