



# **Fighter Aces!: The Constable Maxwell Brothers - Fighter Pilots in Two World Wars**

*Alex Revell*

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When Gerald Constable Maxwell was flying as a fighter pilot in World War I, his brother Michael was born. Both went on to have distinguished flying careers in World War II. This is the story of both men and how their paths crossed during the second conflict.

Gerald served with distinction with 56 Squadron, one of the crack fighter units of WWI in France. Upon his return to England he became Chief Flying Instructor of No. 1 Fighter and Gunnery School at Turnberry. In World War II he served as Station Commander at RAF Ford, a night Fighter station near Arundel, one of the most efficient and happy stations in 11 Group.

Michael followed in his brother's footsteps and joined 56 Squadron in April 1940 to fly the Hawker Hurricane. During May the squadron was moved to France to assist the fast retreating British and French forces as the Germans rapidly advanced. On 27 May, he was shot down whilst attacking ten Heinkel 111s on their way to bomb Dunkirk. Fortunately his first contacts upon landing by parachute were French and he managed to find his way to Ostend where he boarded a trawler and crossed the Channel back to Deal.

56 Squadron had by now returned to their English base at North Weald from where they were flying patrols over the French coast and escorting RAF bombers raiding the German positions. On 8 June, whilst trying to reach returning Blenheims over Le Treport, the Hurricanes were bounced by Bf 109s and again Michael was hit, wounding him in the leg and foot, fortunately he eventually managed a crash landing back at North Weald. During the height of the Battle of Britain Michael was again forced to make a crash landing near Herne Bay which he was lucky to survive as his Hurricane had disintegrated around him.

In the autumn of 1941 Michael was posted to 604 Nightfighter Squadron, led by the legendary 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham flying Beaufighters and eventually Mosquitos. He was eventually to Command the squadron whose tally of enemy aircraft shot down when he left it had reached 100.

This remarkable story includes first-hand combat accounts from both Michael and Gerald and the author has had access to the Constable Maxwell's family records.

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