

The Threat from the Sky

By 1917–1918, German Zeppelin raids had given way to fast, twin-engined Gotha bombers, powered by two Mercedes engines. Flying high and at night, these aircraft brought death and destruction to towns and cities across England.



The Night of 28–29 January 1918

Location:

Near Romford, Essex

Altitude:

Approx. 10,000 feet

German Aircraft:

Gotha G.V (G.V/938/16),
Bogohl 3

After completing a bombing raid on London, the German bomber was intercepted by two Sopwith Camel fighters of No. 44 Home Defence Squadron, flying from Hainault Farm.

A fierce 10–20 minute dogfight followed the London–Southend railway line, witnessed from Shenfield, Billericay and beyond as tracer fire lit the night sky.

The Victory Over Wickford

The British fighters swept near Wickford, fatally damaging the bomber.

With flames and smoke pouring from its engine, the Gotha rolled over and crashed at Friern's Farm, just off London Road.

The Pilots

Captain George H. Hackwill, RFC

Flying a specially adapted “Comic Camel” night-fighter
2nd Lieutenant Charles C.

Banks, RFC

Flying a standard Sopwith
Camel

Both airmen were awarded the Military Cross and recognised in Parliament the following morning.

Wickford was written into history.

Why This Matters

This event marked a turning point in Britain's night air defence.

It demonstrated the courage of early aviators and the effectiveness of newly adapted night-fighting aircraft.

Wickford's place in aviation and wartime history is unique – and worthy of remembrance.



www.wickfordtowncouncil.gov.uk

Saturday 9th May 2026
“Blue Plaque Unveiling
Ceremony”

**Near this spot, the first
enemy bomber was
bought down on
British soil on the night
of 28th January 1918
Lest we Forget**

Royal Flying Corps



Lest We Forget

WICKFORD & THE NIGHT THE BOMBER FELL

28 January 1918

*The first enemy bomber
brought down on British
soil at night*

