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Southampton plaque honours Battle of Britain hero

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BRITISH PATHE

James Brindley Nicolson attacked an enemy plane despite serious injuries and a fire in his cockpit

A plaque has been unveiled in memory of the only Battle of Britain fighter pilot to have won a Victoria Cross.

James Brindley Nicolson attacked a German aircraft over Southampton in August 1940.

He maintained the assault despite a severe fire in his cockpit, before parachuting to the ground with life-threatening injuries.

The memorial, designed by a group of Southampton schoolchildren, is the only tribute to Nicolson on public display.

Intense heat

It was unveiled at Sholing Junior School by Don Smith, who witnessed the action on 16 August 1940.

Mr Smith said: "We saw two planes in combat and then suddenly, from nowhere, a third plane appeared that was already on fire and attacked one of the others, which disappeared over towards the docks trailing smoke."

Nicolson's Hawker Hurricane was fired on by a German Messerschmitt, setting his petrol tank alight and wounding him in the eye, leg and heel, **according to Imperial War Museums.**

"Surrounded by flames and with blood pouring down him from his injuries", he attacked the enemy plane, only bailing out "when he noticed that the intense heat of the cockpit was burning his flesh".



The memorial was designed by children at Sholing Junior School, Southampton.

Nicolson was killed on 2 May 1945 flying as a passenger in a bomber which crashed into the Bay of Bengal after a raid on Japanese installations at Rangoon.

Sholing Junior School deputy headteacher Richard Hutchinson said: "The children saw an injustice in that this guy has been awarded the only Victoria Cross for the Battle of Britain, yet at present no memorial exists."

He said the children spent nine months on the project, raising funds and presenting the plans to MPs at Westminster.