AIRCRAFT CRASHES

Military aircraft operations sometimes resulted in aircraft crashes, particularly during wartime when aerial activity was significantly higher.

Whilst many aircraft crashes occurred during take-off and landing at military airfields, they could occur anywhere across the country. Collisions, enemy engagements, aircraft faults, pilot error, and adverse weather conditions were all causes for crashes.

Depending on the nature of the crash, debris, including aircraft parts and any munitions onboard, could be scattered over a wide area around the crash site.

Wellington X3790 Mark III, 7th August 1943

Douglas A-20 Havoc, 28th May 1944

Consolidated B-24H Liberator, 5th October 1944

Determining the type of aircraft and the activity the aircraft was involved in at the time of crashing is important to understanding any potential Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) hazard it might present. A transport aircraft ferrying personnel between airfields is unlikely to have been armed, whilst a bomber aircraft on return from an unsuccessful mission could have been carrying a full bomb load.

Aircraft crash sites were generally cleared quickly where possible. Those in remote or inaccessible locations may not have been investigated or cleared during wartime.

Crashes outside of wartime were typically more thoroughly cleared of debris than those which occurred during wartime, reducing the potential for an associated UXO hazard to remain.

Hazard

Whether an aircraft crash provides a potential source of UXO hazard is dependent on the type of aircraft that crashed, its operational status, its ordnance load, and any clearance efforts.

Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) from the aircraft's defensive guns is the most common source of ordnance associated with aircraft crashes. Some later aircraft were armed with 20mm cannons which fired cannon shells instead of SAA. Cannon shells have High Explosive (HE) content and constitute a more significant potential UXO hazard than SAA. Both SAA and cannon shells could scatter over a wide area around a crash site.

Aircraft crashing with full or partial bomb loads may provide a potential Unexploded Bomb (UXB) hazard. Bombs may have been jettisoned prior crashing, thrown wide of the aircraft during the crash, or remained onboard.

Unless disturbed, there is no statutory requirement for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to clear aircraft crash sites. The MoD advise that if crashed aircraft are found, they should be left undisturbed where possible. Where a fatal crash site is located, the disturbance of the site may be prohibited due to its status as a war grave.

Every effort has been made to identify the original source of images. Any breach of copyright is unintentional. If you are the proven originator of any image, we would be happy to remove the image on request.

Tel: 01993 886682
Email: uxo@zetica.com
Web: www.zeticauxo.com

Zetica House
Southfield Road, Eynsham
Oxfordshire, OX29 4JB