

Flight Lieutenant Jean Offenbergh, a native of Brussels who had joined the Belgian Air Force on 23rd November 1936. On 10th May 1940 during the German invasion of his homeland, 'Pyker' destroyed a Dornier Do 17 bomber and damaged another in combat whilst flying Fiat CR42 biplane fighters. By the time of his death, he had been credited with 7 enemy aircraft destroyed, 5 probably destroyed, and 7 damaged. Arriving in Great Britain on 7th July 1940, 'Pyker' was sent to the RAF depot at Gloucester before being posted to No. 6 Operational Training Unit at Sutton Bridge in Lincolnshire. Shortly after, on 17th August, Pilot Officer Offenbergh reported to No 145 Squadron flying Hawker Hurricane fighters throughout the Battle of Britain. Ten months later, on 17th June 1941, 'Pyker' was posted to No. 609 Squadron. An immensely popular and gifted pilot, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross on 4th August and the citation reads: "This officer carried out a lone patrol over Cherbourg, in cloudless conditions, in May 1941. During the sortie he attacked and destroyed a Heinkel 60 and damaged another. Later in the sortie he probably destroyed a Messerschmitt 109 and drove another off." The Squadron Operational Records book for 22nd January 1942 records both the story of his loss, and the regard in which he was held by his colleagues: "This is the saddest day the Squadron has endured for many months, for it sees the death of F/Lt Offenbergh, DFC, Croix de Guerre, in an air collision. He is flying in formation with P/O Roelandt when suddenly an aircraft of 92 Squadron (Sgt de Renzl, FR), doubtless practicing attack, comes straight for him from above. F/Lt Offenbergh pulls up sharply, but it is too late; the tail unit of his a/c is cut right off, both aircraft hurtle down to the ground, both pilots are killed. So departs one of the kindest and finest leaders. "He would have made a good Wing Commander", the Station Commander was overheard to say to W/C Blatchford this evening." Postwar, 'Pyker's' story was written from the contents of his diary by Victor Houart, and published under the title of 'Lonely Warrior'.

OFFENBERGH, Jean Henri Marie, from Brussels, Belgium, joined the Belgian Force Aérienne in 1939 and was posted to 4 Squadron of II Groupe, 2nd Regiment d'Aéronautique at Nivelles, flying Fiat CR42's. On 10th May 1940, the first day of the German attack on his country, he destroyed a Do17. He then flew several more missions before flying to France. He continued to fly on defensive patrols until the Armistice, and then escaped to Algeria via Corsica in a stolen Caudron Simoun. He got on a ship to the United Kingdom, arriving in July and joining the RAF. After training on British types he was posted to 145 Squadron in Scotland, seeing action when the squadron moved south late in the Battle of Britain. On 8th September, while still in the North, he shared in damaging a Do17, and on 27th October probably destroyed a Bf109. He shot down Bf109's on 1st and 6th November, and on the 9th damaged a Ju88. On 11th December, while flying alone he destroyed a He111 and a He60 floatplane, and damaged one of the latter. He became the first Belgian pilot to receive the DFC. On 5th May 1941 he destroyed a Bf109E. He was then posted to 609 Squadron which had established a Belgian flight, and was known as 'Pyker' in this unit. He damaged a Bf109 on 22nd June and on 7th July shot one down. He probably destroyed others on 19th July, 6th August, 27th and 29th August, and damaged Bf109's on 27th September and 13th October. His score then stood at 7 destroyed, 6 with the RAF, 5 probables and 6½ damaged, 5½ with the RAF. Late in 1941 he was promoted to flight commander to lead the Belgian flight. On 22nd January 1942 while on a training sortie, a Spitfire of 92 Squadron crashed into him, and he was killed.