

WAR RELIC FOUND IN RUISLIP WOODS

by Colin Bowlt

During coppicing at the end of 2008 a dummy hand grenade was found in Copse Wood. One can imagine the concern when it was first discovered (is it alive? dare we touch it?). It was very realistic. It had to be, of course, since it was clearly designed for training purposes – it was exactly the weight of the real thing. The give-away on closer inspection was that the lever (see figure) was moulded integral with the body of the weapon.



It was identified by the Imperial War Museum as a dummy of the type of grenade described in the manuals as '*Grenade, Hand, Fragmentation HE (high explosive), with a danger radius of 30 yards*'.

It was of a type developed during the years between the World Wars, but continued in use, with modifications, up to the time of the Korean War. Significantly it was of American type.

The proximity of the site of Battle of Britain House, which had been used by the Americans during WWII for training secret agents for dropping into occupied France, strongly suggests that this had been used for such training. It was clear that a training dummy needed to be exactly the same weight as a real grenade so that trainees could practice the force to throw it more than 30 yards – you don't get a second chance in action.

One of the modifications was the M5 Detonating Fuse with a 4-5 second delay. These were apparently rather risky things, so the grenades were stored and issued unfused.

The Grenade Recognition Manual states:
'This grenade must be fuze[d] [U.S. spelling] prior to use.

- Unscrew and remove the wooden shipping plug.

- *Examine the cavity in the explosive, if it is blocked or not of sufficient size to receive the fuze without friction, use a wooden stick of about 1/4 inch diameter to enlarge it.*
- *Ensure the fuze sealer and washer are in place and insert the fuze.*
- *Holding the fuze stationary, screw the grenade body onto it.*
- *Tighten the fuze using the wrench provided.'*

Tricky stuff!, particularly if you couldn't find the wrench or a suitable wooden stick.

When I took the object to the Imperial War Museum in a plastic bag I thought perhaps I ought to tell the Security Check what I had brought along; and please which department should I go to. They quickly decided I was going nowhere. "Please stand over there while we try to contact the appropriate person." A phone call – a wait - oh dear, he was not in. Just then Security recognised the appropriate person emerging through he swing doors on his way to lunch. He quickly recognised the object for what it was, but asked me to continue standing there while he took it away to examine it more closely. After a while he reappeared with the precise details (see above), and continued on his way to lunch.

Now that it had been confirmed as only a dummy grenade I told security that since I was here I would like to have a look at the Museum. "No Sir! Afraid we can't allow that Sir!" "But it's only a dummy". "Can't help that, Sir." No good arguing, and anyhow I had got the information I wanted. Bright idea! I hadn't visited the Tate Gallery in years and I had plenty of time. I could walk there... and then I thought what if they also have a Security Check (and nobody to confirm the grenade a harmless dummy). Visions of alarm bells, evacuation of the gallery, the police! I turned round and headed for home.

This find appears to be one of the few evocative reminders of the clandestine activities, which took place in the Ruislip Woods more than 60 years ago.