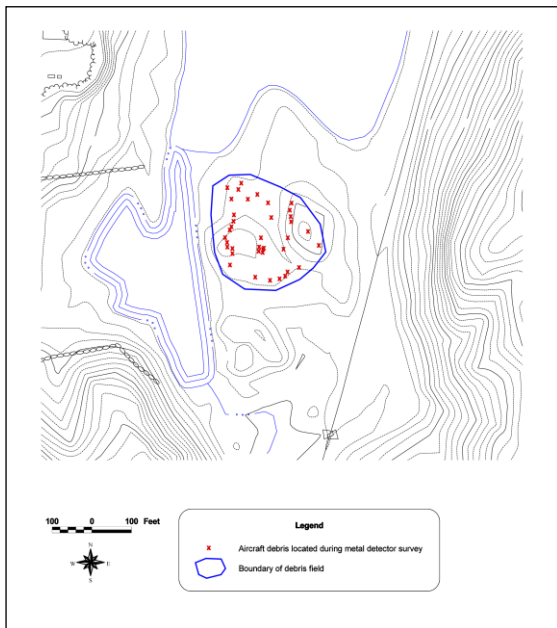


## World War II “Hellcat” Crash Sites Preston, Connecticut

In January 2005, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development contracted with AHS to conduct archaeological investigations and historical documentation of cultural resources located on the former Norwich State Hospital property in Norwich and Preston, Connecticut. Among those resources were the sites where two F6F-5N “Hellcat” fighter planes crashed after colliding on October 19, 1944, while they were practicing a newly developed and highly dangerous maneuver: night-time interceptions using only radar. Aircraft parts embedded in the ground are still visible at the surface at each of the impact sites (both pilots were killed). But how should the sites be defined for preservation planning purposes, given that the debris fields could extend quite far from the centers of impact?



*Catapult wing hook, still visible at one of the sites.*



*Archaeological site boundary defined by using metal-detector finds.*

In order to define a reasonable boundary for each site, AHS conducted a subsurface metal-detector survey. The metal-detector technicians began at the visible debris and worked their way outward. The vast majority of hits were small fragments of sheet aluminum, probably from the aircrafts’ exterior skin. When the hits dropped off sharply, the position was recorded using GPS equipment; the drop-off points were then connected to define a polygonal boundary for the most intense part of the debris field. One site extended over 9 acres, while the other was much more compact, 1 ½ acres.

AHS prepared documentation for designating the two crash sites as State Archaeological Preserves, using for the boundaries the extent of the debris fields as defined by the metal-detecting survey. The two sites received State Archaeological Preserve designation in 2006. AHS also prepared a 24-page, illustrated public-education booklet about the historical and archaeological significance of the sites.