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A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST by ERIC FOINETTE

In the early morning of 26 February 1942, I was the navigator of a Wellington MK 2 bomber, no Z8410 with Squadron identification of PH-C, on its way to Kiel. Shortly after crossing the Danish coast we were hit by flak, as a result of which we lost the use of our starboard engine, the propeller of which had to be feathered.

As we lost height steadily, we jettisoned our bombs and other heavy equipment but to no avail. At first we turned back in the hope of returning to England, but severe icing conditions made that virtually impossible, so it was decided to turn round again and try to make for Sweden.

This also proved beyond us and when we had descended to about 2000 feet (600-700 metres) and were passing over water, our captain decided that we had to bale out and once again we turned around to regain land. We all then took to our parachutes, the last of us getting out at about 1500 feet (500 metres) but all landed safely on the vicinity of Odense.

As I recall, there was thick snow on the ground, and I buried my chute together with my Sidcot flying suit in the snow beneath a tree. I then walked through the heavy snow until I found what appeared to be a lane cut in the snow and followed this until some lights appeared at what proved to be a farm.

Going into the outbuildings, I met a herdsman tending some cows. It was about 4 am. I was very surprised at the lack of "black out" precautions, and in an optimistic vein, enquired in my 2 or 3 words of German whether I was indeed in Sweden. Alas no!!

I was taken into the farmhouse, where the farmer gave me some coffee & sandwiches.

After some time, a Danish policeman arrived, presumably having been notified of my arrival by the farmer, and having checked that I was unarmed, he apologised for the fact that, as the Germans knew an aircraft had crashed in the area, they would be

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looking for its crew. After about 2 hours or so, the Germans arrived at the farm, and I was escorted to the local police station, and later with all the other 5 crew members, we were taken to some barracks in Odense, and held there for 2 days before starting our journey to Germany by train to spend the next 3½ years in captivity.

From information given by a Dane, whom he met in Australia some years ago, to Dave Wardill (Australian second pilot) it appeared that the plane crashed at Seden, north of Odense.

At the beginning of July 1983, Danish Stories made a special offer of a 2 day visit to Odense, and as I had always wanted to return there, this seemed to be the chance for which I had been waiting. Before deciding however, I wrote to the Mayor of Odense, explaining what had happened and asking if they might have any records in the Town Hall about the incident. The Mayor set in motion the Odense Corporation's archivists, and also had a short article put in the local paper requesting help from any individuals.

The first reaction was from a Danish journalist, Steen Friis, who works for a Copenhagen weekly magazine. He telephoned me to inquire if I had ~~still~~ received any information to date, and on being told "no", he volunteered to take us around to search anything we could, so I immediately booked a visit for my wife, Eileen, and me to start on Thursday, 11th August. Unfortunately this covered Saturday and Sunday in Odense, and were to find that many shops closed after Friday and all were closed on Saturday after 1 pm.

Soon after the visit was agreed, a letter was received from Olav Nielsen, who said that he was the policeman who took charge of me, and that he would be pleased to meet me again, also offering a bed if required. This was indeed gold, and I rang Steen Friis to give him the good news.

Subsequently I received a long letter from Alderman Witheyd, head of Odense Plans and Records office, giving details with maps showing the actual location where the plane landed, and also where 4 of the crew

had descended around Odense. He also enclosed a photo of the farm at Seden as well as sending an invitation to lunch with the Mayor. ③

There was indeed marvellous news, which was again passed on to Steen. The luncheon invitation unfortunately had to be declined because the City Hall was closed at weekends.

On the Saturday before our departure, another letter arrived from the Mayor's department, confirming most of the information in the previous letter and enclosing an extract from the "Wartime History of Odense" in which reference was made to our Wellington crashing at Neder Holly about 6 miles S.E. of Odense.

Another letter was sent by a Mr Rita Andersen, which however did not arrive until after we had left for Denmark, and she said that her father Hans Faunty Nielsen was the headsmen at Seden farm who met me, and that he would like to see me.

On Thursday, 11th August, after a pleasant and easy drive to Hennich, we embarked on FDFS boat "Dana Regina" for a marvellously smooth voyage of 19 hours to Esbjerg, circling these around mid-day on Friday.

The accommodation on board was very comfortable and we had a two-beth cabin on the outside complete with toilet and an excellent shower. For the evening meal, we sampled the Cold Table (Emprebörd) - a serve-yourself array of cold meats, fish, salads, cheese & breads with sweets galore! Breakfast with bacon and eggs (extra), cereals, rolls, cheeses & salami plus orange juice/milk and coffee, completed our feasting on board.

From Esbjerg, we had reserved seats on the trains to Odense, but Steen had arranged to pick us up at Helsingør at the east side of Jutland, and he took us by car along the older roads instead of the motorway. The road runs alongside the railway over a lattice girder bridge between Jutland & Funen. I certainly recalled going over this bridge by train through to Flensburg and Germany.

On arrival at Hotel Windsor, a note was waiting to say that an appointment had been made by the local press to meet us. Steen however objected because the local paper was printed daily, while his magazine didn't come out till Thursday and his story would have

been spoiled. However, as the local men wanted me to meet the herdsman, Steen agreed provided that I didn't give him an interview. This situation was most embarrassing to me, because the local press had been used to obtain various information for which I had asked, but since the local reporters had not contacted me as Steen had done, my hands were tied and I had to support Steen.

We all went straight off to the Marielund hospital where Hans Beuritz Nielsen now lives, and although at 92 he is very frail, he was mentally very alert and spoke to me in English, which he had not used ~~much~~ for very many years. Prior to becoming a herdsman he had been a sailor. His daughter, Mrs Rita Andersen, was present and had brought a bottle of port so that we could all drink a toast. It was indeed a very dramatic meeting and it is incredible that it could take place after 41 years. Hans was clearly very delighted to meet me again and our meeting was terminated when the nurse said she felt he had had enough excitement.

We returned to the centre of Odense and Steen took us on a quiet visit to Hans Anderson's birth place, and took some photos.

Steen then drove us out to meet the former policeman, Clem Nielsen, at Agedrup near Seden, now a northern suburb of Odense, and where Clem and his family live in an 18th century thatched farmhouse, with the usual outbuildings forming an internal courtyard.

On the journey from Helsingør, Steen had explained that in 1942 the resistance movement on Funen was very small, although on the other two islands of Jutland and Zealand, it was more active, and that on Jutland a doctor had managed to conceal about 20 women in his hospital for 2 years. He had also explained that the Danes believed that the Germans had agreed that any women first taken by the Danes would be interned by them and Clem had expected this to happen to me, but the Germans decided otherwise. I must admit that I find it difficult to believe that the Germans would have allowed any such arrangement.

Steen also said that when Denmark was occupied, most of the regular police were arrested and that a sort of special constabulary was instituted, and presumably Clem was part of this force, as he would have been in his early 20's.

Soon after the incident with me, apparently he felt that he could not continue as a policeman under German rule and he resigned to take up farming. Blem had told Steen that he was nervous about meeting me in case I still blamed him for handing me over to the Germans, and had been very relieved to learn that I considered that he had had little alternative.

We therefore received a very warm welcome on arrival at his house, and looked at various wartime documents together - comparing my prison camp ~~number~~ identity card with his wartime identity card. Around the walls of his dining room were some 9 or 10 hunting guns with the mounted antlers of deer he had shot. On the living room walls were Royal Copenhagen blue Christmas plates which are now very valuable.

We all drove out to see where the farm had been in Seden, now a housing estate. Then I was shown the field where I must have landed and it had a tree very like the one under which I had ~~been~~ buried my parachute and helmet - they weren't still there however! It was explained that I must have found my way to a lane - and then crossed a stream by a small bridge before reaching the farm - I cannot recall this.

Later I was taken to a memorial stone to 14 Danish patriots who had been shot by the Germans.

On our return we all sat down to tea - Blem with wife, daughter Hanna, son Hans, ~~and~~ Steen, Eileen and me. Mrs Nelson and Hanna work in a local hospital. The tea was most enjoyable with Danish bread, butter, soft and other cheeses. There were also preserves of plums & rose hips in syrup. Cheese biscuits etc with Jasmine and Earl Grey tea.

Mrs Nelson apparently had been very worried about entertaining us and had asked in several shops what she should provide for her British guests. She had also obtained some small Danish flags and Union Jacks to decorate the table - one shop said they hadn't any Union Jacks, but would German flags be any use? She had started to make a special cake for us, but when Steen rang to say we would be late because of our visit to the hospital, she put

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the cake mix in the refrigerator, but it rose so much that she couldn't cook it for us!! She also indicated to Eileen that they had expected us for a meal on the next day, Saturday, for which we would have had venison, but we couldn't very well accept as they thought, incorrectly, that Steen was taking care of us for the whole weekend. After tea, Steen took us into his home in Odense and then he carried on to Helsingør where he was due to interview a Danish royal Duke. The Duke had renounced his claim to the throne when he married a divorce or commoner. Steen was due to see him at 8 pm but didn't leave Odense till about 9 pm and it was some 60 miles to his home. However he had instructed his wife to provide ample wine - a weakness of the Duke - and he apparently made the correct judgement as the Duke was still there when he got home.

Our room in Hotel Windsor was very comfortable and complete with television - normal cost 4.30 kroner (£30) per night. Since the whole trip was only £75, and we stayed 2 nights, while the single ferry was normally £68, it was quite a bargain especially as the train fare was also included!

Breakfast was described as "Continental" but not the French style as it comprised cereal, preserves, rolls and butter, sausage slices and salami, plus soft cheeses, orange or other fruit, coffee or tea.

After breakfast on the Saturday we strolled around town and then separated. I visited the Town Hall, but no-one was there except a receptionist, so I left my card for Alderman Wittekind. I was able to have a quick look round the new part which has a most impressive hall. Another short visit to St Knud's Cathedral which was also very interesting.

I then decided to try to find the barracks in which I was detained, so went along to the police station. This was obviously a post-war building. I enquired if it replaced some older building which had been a police station, but the officer was doubtful about this. He did however suggest the barracks in South Boulevard as a probable place, so I walked there and saw the block where Alice and I were held. It was at right angles to the road whereas I thought it was parallel, but the shops on the opposite side of the

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road convinced me that it was the right place. Trams used to run down the road which I think has been widened since the war. I spoke to an army lance corporal who could speak English and got permission to go inside the compound to photograph.

In the afternoon I decided to try to find where the plane crashed and caught a bus to the University area near Killeberg. I walked around there to Neder Holbyg, but found that most of the area was built up, and I was unable to locate anything from the maps sent me which I believe were the 1942 ones.

It being Eileen's birthday, we had a celebration ~~dinner~~ in Hotel Windsor - an excellent repast including frog's legs, steak in barbecue sauce. Eileen had roast duck. At breakfast time we had been presented with a copy of the local paper with my photo on the front page greeting Hans Lauritz Nielsen at the hospital and an article about my visit. As I couldn't read this, I had left it but in the evening I asked the receptionist to translate it, without realising the length of a second article inside. It took her about 1½ hours but was worth it, since it referred to the person at Neder Holbyg who had some parts of the Wellington, which he was willing to give me. Luckily he was on the telephone and the receptionist fixed up for me to visit him the following morning (Sunday) at 10 am.

Immediately after breakfast, I got a taxi from the station to Neder Holbyg where I met Høff Herluf Hansen, his wife & son Henning, who could speak English very well. We sat down and I showed various photos, Krønique log book etc, while we had a drink of sherry. Herluf said the aircraft parts were down the road where his father had lived, and where his sister and family now resided, so we drove there to meet them with the brother-in-law and son named Hans Haugaard. The son had spent a month or so as a nurseman in England and was now at Odense University reading Biology. Again we had drinks - lager this time - and they produced 4 pieces of equipment from the plane which I tried to identify. One was a hydraulic U pipe. Another was a broken piece with calibrations showing drift to Port & Starboard, which I thought was part of the drift indicator from

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the rear turret. The other two bits were a 4" diameter circular box with a trigger mechanism inside, and its cover. The cover had a white plastic plate riveted on containing instructions regarding setting the mechanism. Because of its reference to an explosive charge, I thought that it might be part of the cutters for balloon wire. It may however be part of the starter mechanism for the engines. Except for the ~~depth~~ drift dial, they were in excellent condition.

Next I was taken across the road to the field ^{near} which the aircraft crashed, now part of a housing estate. However the gap in some trees was still noticeable where the plane had cut them off. The plane broke up and a landing wheel ran on cones 400 metres. Jorgen Jacobson, now a barrister and John Linge had their photos taken on this wheel, a copy of this photo appearing in the local paper on 4th August 1983 and reproduced here.

When the wreck of the plane was located, the Germans put a cordon around it and presumably examined it in detail to find any information they could. As the aircraft did not catch fire, presumably they would find my maps, log and air plot from Binbrook. After checking it over, the Germans apparently withdrew the cordon and the locals were able to take parts for mementos. One woman is supposed to have collected enough scrap aluminium to sell and buy herself a wrist watch.

Apparently the crash did not wake any one up and didn't even dent the ground which was described as hard as concrete. Herluf's sister, Mrs Haugaard, however says she heard something and looked out of the window but as it was dark, saw nothing.

After taking photos of the family, I presented Herluf with my Wrenkenby Register tile (12 x 626 equations) in exchange for the souvenirs. Henning then ran me into Odense via Tombyerg and Blangstedgaard, two farms where other crew members landed. According to the letter from Alderman Witwand, the son of the owner of Store Tombyerg was present when a crew member arrived and sheltered in the cowhouse, and he would welcome a visit. Unfortunately in the turmoil of all the other visits, I'm afraid that I missed this point and although we stopped outside the farm to photo it, we did not contact the son.

While we were going along the road near Tombycz, Henning told the story about women being frightened by a strange looking man on the road in the dark who was gesticulating and speaking in a foreign language which they couldn't understand. This could have been either Frank or Dave all dressed up in leather flying jacket, trousers and boots!!

On arrival back in Odense, I collected our luggage from the hotel and went to meet Eileen in the nearby park "by the ducks" before going to the station for the train. We again met our fellow travellers Alby and Betty Garforth in the reserved compartment, and it transpired that Alby had been a New Zealand wireless operator flying with the RAF in the middle East. Consequently we had plenty to talk about on the way home, especially as they had the adjacent cabin on the ship.

On board in the evening, we decided to make a foursome and have an à la carte dinner instead of the Smørrebrød, but this proved disastrous.

We all asked for poached salmon, but it took $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours before it arrived and by then the plates were cold - we didn't dare send the plates back for heating! As a compensation we were not charged for the sweet - chocolate basket with icecream and raspberries - a result of Eileen and Alby's check.

After another most pleasant voyage back on *Dana Regia*, which is a beautifully appointed vessel, we arrived at Harwich next day some $\frac{1}{2}$ hours late due to adverse currents and wind.

From Harwich, the old Ford Cortina started at first shot and we drove home leisurely, calling at Toggleshall on the way as rumour had it that the Sonnets family had once lived there. But no traces could be found in the churchyard.

In an attempt to get positive identification of the aircraft parts, I sent a letter to the aircraft manufacturers, but after 2 months have received no answer.