

First Airman to Sweden

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The story of **Donald V. Smith** told by *Dave Smith* adavid.smith@sympatico.ca for www.airmen.dk, where photos from Ron Wellings and him were inserted.

As a young boy growing up in Canada during the 1950's most of my friends' fathers had served in various branches of the armed forces and the guys often boasted about their father's combat experience. I thought that there wasn't much to tell about my father. He never spoke much about his war time experience. He had told my brothers and I that he had been on ground crew, that he had been fed a lot of mutton and Brussels sprouts, and then when they went to a pub they went to the washroom they would leave a note saying that they had spit in their beer so that no one else would drink it and then come back and find someone had written "And so have I". It was not until I was 18 that I discovered that he had earned his wings, and served as Flight Engineer in a Stirling Bomber, flown 19 operations with Bomber Command, and that he had been the sole survivor when his plane was shot down, and that he was the first Allied airman to escape from occupied Denmark.

One evening in the spring of 1968 we were having dinner when my mother said that she had heard an announcement on the radio that a Danish man was trying to locate a Sgt. D.V. Smith from Toronto who had been shot down over Denmark and escaped. She urged my father to tell my brothers and I about the incident, so he dug out an old notebook and read us a very brief summary of the events. He later contacted the man who had been looking for him, Mr. Jorgen Helme *, who had researched the planes that had been shot down over Denmark and contacting surviving crew members. They made arrangements to meet and that summer my parents flew to Denmark and Mr. Helme took Dad on a tour to retrace the route that he had taken from the crash site at Kongsmark, on the east side of Sjaelland, across to Copenhagen and up to Helsingoer. They made a second trip in 1978 and between the two trips Dad had managed to connect with many of the people who had helped him along his way. His last trip back to Denmark was in the spring of 1993. He had recently been diagnosed with cancer, but postponed treatment in order to attend the unveiling ceremony for a monument to his crew at Kongsmark.

* When Jorgen Helme died his private archive was sold to the Flyvevaabnets Bibliotek (Royal Danish Air Force Library).

Donald Smith died in Oct. 1998. It was his wish that his ashes be buried along side the graves of his crew mates at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Svinoe. Thanks to Ron Wellings, an expatriate Brit living in Denmark, we found out who to contact at the CWGC in Belgium and made the arrangements. The plan was to meet a representative of the CWGC at Svino on April 21, 1999, but we would not be able to have a ceremony, to put up any form of commemoration, or to have any publicity.

Meanwhile, at the suggestion of Svino's vicar, Mette Magnusson, Ron Wellings contacted the British embassy in Copenhagen. We were contacted by Commander Gordon-Lennox, military attaché at the British Embassy in Copenhagen who asked us if we would be willing to reschedule the interment to May 4 because they would be there for Liberation Day ceremonies that day.



Ejner and Sylvia Tjørn

Judy, Curt, Brian, Freda and Dave Smith.

Sgt Trevor Davis and Cmdr A. Gordon Lennox from the British Embassy



Beneath the colours of the Royal Air Force Donald Smith's ashes are lowered into the ground.



Dave, Brian and Curt Smith after the urn was interred.

Vicar Mette Magnusson and others

We went ahead and made out travel arrangements. A week before our departure, we received a fax from Sgt. Trevor Davison with an itinerary that included a visit to the crash site where the local historical society had arranged a wreath laying ceremony. They had even arranged for Dad's pilot's sister and her family to be present, and for a luncheon at the Kirke Stillinge town meeting hall. Among those present that day were Ron and Elsa Wellings and Helge Christiansen and his wife. We were quite surprised when we arrived at the church in Svinoe the next day to discover that not only was there to be a ceremony, but that it had been well publicized. Aside from representatives from the British, Canadian and American embassies, there were dozens of Danish citizens in attendance, and a number of television and newspaper reporters. Apparently there had been negotiations between the embassy, CWGC, the church council and the Vaern om Danmark to arrange for a plot bordering the war graves section of the cemetery. After the service we were invited to the vicarage for a wonderful dinner and then returned to the church in the evening for the Liberation Day ceremonies.

I have been back to Denmark twice since then and enjoyed wonderful receptions. On my second trip, Ron Wellings and Jorgen Helme guided us along Dad's escape route across the island of Sjaelland to Copenhagen and on to Helsingoer and Aalsgaarde where they even managed to wangle an invitation into the house on the beach where Dad was taken in and given his first real meal, bath and a bed since his ordeal began almost a week earlier.

I was never able to get my father to sit down and talk about his experiences. I did manage to get a copy of his detailed account of escape. During my visits to Denmark and meeting some of the people who helped him I learned a lot more. My father was a much too humble to boast about his adventure in Denmark, but it was an amazing feat, and the story is a tribute to him and to the many good Danes who helped him along the way.

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Donald Smith was born in the small farming community of Beeton, Ontario. Life in the country during the Depression was tough. and Don learned the value of hard work and



This later photo is from Dave Smith



perseverance. He earned spending money by working for local farmers and helping out his parents with the family garden and rabbit ranch. His father was a craftsman with a knack for a number of different trades and passed on some of his skills to his three sons. The family moved to Toronto in the late 30s and Don attended Danforth Technical School. Shortly after graduation in 1940 he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

After completing documentation and receiving a uniform at No. 1 Manning Depot in Toronto he was posted to the No.6 Depot at Trenton and in 1941 volunteered for overseas service and was sent to No.402 Squadron where he serviced Hurricane and Spitfire aircraft. In 1942 he re-mustered to aircrew, took a Flight Engineer's Course at St. Athans S.Wales and graduated as Flight Engineer on Stirling bombers. Due to heavy losses, there was a big demand for crews to man the four engine bombers that were replacing the old Wellingtons and Hampdens.

After completing a six week course he was posted to No. 75 Squadron RNZAF at Newmarket and met the crew he was to fly with:
(The normal crew including Don)



Standing, from the left:

PO Elmer Robert Vance Navigator RCAF

Sgt Donald V. Smith Flight Engineer RCAF

Flt. Lt. Charles Woodbine Parish DFC Pilot RAF

Sgt. Jack Lees Rear Gunner RAF

Flt. Sgt. James Stanley Marshall Bomb Aimer RCAF

Kneeling, from the left:

Flt. Sgt. Louis John Krulicki Wireless Operator RCAF

Sgt. Dennis Charles Farley Mid Upper Gunner RAF

(S/Ldr Wilfred A. Blake RAF came to this crew just before the last mission – no photo)

This was the skipper's third crew. Parish had been the sole survivor of a plane lost over the Channel. That plane, a Wellington, was lost due to heavy icing on return from Germany. He had bailed out and landed in the Channel about 11 miles from shore. After many hours of swimming in the rough, frigid waters he was barely able to pull himself ashore. After another operation he had been hospitalized due to severe frostbite. After completing on tour he was posted to a training squadron but in the fall of 1942 he requested that he be posted back to an operational training squadron.

Stirling I of 7 Squadron at RAF Oakington

On Oct. 21, 1942 the crew started some familiarization flying in the new Stirlings and after 11 hours and fifteen minutes of daylight and four hours and five minutes of night flying they went on their first raid, a nine hour trip to Turin, followed by 18 more to such targets as Berlin, Stuttgart, St. Lorient, Hamburg, Wilhemshaven, Cologne, Munich, Frankfurt, Mannheim and Stettin, the latter being his final operational flight.

On the evening of April 20, 1943 their target was Stettin and their mission was to mark the target on the first run, circle and make a second pass to drop high



Stirling ground crew

explosive bombs. At the briefing they were introduced to S/Ldr W.A. Blake, a Canadian in the RAF who was new to the squadron. He was to accompany the crew of the plane "M" for Mother for his first operational flight, and their plane was to be the lead aircraft because they were one of the most experienced crews. After the briefing, the crew went to the mess hall for a good meal of fried eggs and chips, bread and butter with jam and tea.

Around 8:00 pm the crew walked out to the plane. Parish always wanted his crew to walk to the flight line because one never knew when they might have to bail out and have to do a lot of walking. After checking their aircraft, Parish gathered the crew together to review emergency procedures and what to do in case something should happen that night. Because there was an extra crewmember in the front, Don was instructed that, should he have to bail out, to use the rear escape hatch. This was the first time Parish had mentioned this prior to takeoff. Normally it was only done when they practised escape procedures.

At 9:00 they were on their way across the North Sea, headed for the Danish coast. They had been told to fly low over Denmark and then gain altitude over the Baltic. As they crossed the west coast of Jutland the night fighters could be seen taking off below. Ground defences opened up on and Don saw two bombers go down on their starboard. In all, 22 aircraft were lost over Denmark that night and most of the crews were killed because of the low altitude. Within a short time, they had passed over Jutland and started to steadily gain altitude to 11,000 feet, the height from which they were to drop their bombs.

It was a cloudless, and moon was full, but "Mother" was equipped with H2S radar that could pick out the target even if there had been cloud cover. The bomb aimer and navigator were both able to pick out the marshalling yards to make sure they were on target. As they approached the target, more than 50 searchlights were turned on and it was not long before they had the plane in a cone, but Parish skilfully maneuvered out of it. They had arrived a little too early and had to circle around to make another pass, and all the time the Germans were throwing everything they had at them. It was on the second pass that the starboard engine was struck by flak. Don informed the skipper and he feathered the engine, but as they approached the target the bomb aimer reported problems with the bomb sight and bomb release. Parish circled again but the problems could not be corrected. Rather than drop their flares on the wrong spot and hinder the success of the mission, Parish aborted and left it to the back up aircraft to mark the target.

They turned back towards the Baltic to head for home on three engines and were having trouble maintaining altitude. Jimmy reported that there was a German airfield, Peenemuende, and suggested they drop their bomb load in it. Parish made a sharp turn and flew over the base at low altitude and the bombs were successfully released. The gunners strafed the planes on the ground.

As they neared the island of Sjaelland the skipper managed to get the plane up to 6,500 feet, still a dangerous altitude for ground defences, especially with a full moon and no clouds to hide in. As they approached the Belt between Fyn and Sjaelland Parish spotted a flak ship, so he turned over the island in case they were hit. Don was seated with Bob Vance, navigator, who showed him their location on the map. They were just north of the town of Korsoer on the west coast of Sjaelland and informed the crew over the intercom. Since they had seen so many night fighters over Jutland, Parish told the crew to keep a

sharp lookout and they were sitting ducks at that altitude. Don went to the astrodome and no sooner got there than he spotted an ME 110 on the port side. He was close enough that Don saw the fighter pilot turn his head to look at them. He yelled to Parish, who took evasive action.

Thanks to Jorgen Helme's research of German archives, Don learned years later that they were up against one of the Luftwaffe's top night fighter pilots, Unteroffizier Berg of III/NJG. His first attack came from the port side, followed by one from the starboard. The second pass set the gas tanks on fire in both wings. The plane immediately went out of control and a clear, calm voice came over the intercom "Sorry boys, you are going to have to jump. Best of luck". That was at 02:00 April 21, 1943.

As mentioned earlier, Parish had instructed Don to use the rear escape hatch because of the extra crewmember in the front. With the aircraft going almost straight down it was difficult for Don to get up over the bomb bay to get to the rear hatch. He managed to get part way back when the plane lurched again and Don was thrown back against the bulkhead formed by the wing spars. Just then, the plane was hit again by the mid upper gunner and wireless operator stations. Cannon fire ripped through the spot where Don had been before being thrown back and missed his head by inches. While the mid upper gunner was likely killed in that attack, the damage done to the plane provided a lucky break for Don. He used the holes ripped in the fuselage as hand and foot holds to climb to the rear escape hatch, which he found partly opened, and Louis Krulicki, the wireless operator crumpled beside it, Don planned to open the hatch all the way, attach a static line to Louis and push him out, but as he pushed the hatch open the rush of air pulled his chest chute and yanked him out of the plane. Falling to the ground with his parachute dangling over his head, Don was finally able to pull the rip cord to deploy the chute, just about the same time that the plane crashed into the ground and exploded. The tail gunner was firing all the way down. It was just a few seconds later that Don landed, luckily, in a freshly plowed field.

Don had landed a few fields from the spot where the plane had crashed. There was a water hole surrounded by bushes. He took off his parachute and ripped it up with the dagger he always carried. He kept some of the material for bandages because he had cut his hands on the jagged edges of the holes from the cannon. He threw the remainder of the parachute * and his Mae West into the bushes and covered them with brush and immediately headed south, away from the crash and was soon up to his knees in a muddy swamp and after clearing that he came to an east-west road. He was about to cross it when he spotted two German scout cars coming up the road. He threw himself into the ditch and they passed within a few feet of him. They were likely on their way to the crash site. Due to their being seven bodies found in the wreckage, the Germans likely assumed that the entire crew had perished. They would not have known that there had been an extra crewman that night.

* His parachute was found at Møllegaard in Kelstrup. They hid it and made dresses for their children after the war.

Maintaining a steady boy scout run and walk, he put as much distance between himself and the plane as possible, but by 5 am he was too tired to go any further. He spotted a clump of trees by a water hole and made his way toward it. There he covered himself



with some dead branches and slept for an hour. When he awoke he looked out from his hiding spot and saw a farmer sowing grain by hand. He ducked down and kept out of sight until noon, passing the time by stripping his uniform of its Canadian badges, stripes and wings and removing the epaulets from his jacket so that it would not look like a uniform.

When the farmer went for lunch Don made his way to a deserted farmhouse and stayed there while planning his escape. By 5:30 he had mustered enough courage to chance it. As he started off, a low flying plane swooped over him. He thought that the plane might have been looking for him, but he kept walking through fields and a dry river bed until 9:30 pm. by which time he had no idea which direction he should go. Seeing a solitary farmer in a field, Don approached him and tried to communicate with him in sign language. The farmer did not seem to recognize that he was an Allied airman, but his daughter came along with her younger brother, and she seemed to realize it right away and went to get their mother, who took him back to the farm house and cooked a meal of eggs, rye bread and coffee made from roasted grain while the boy stayed outside and kept

an eye out for Germans. Don was not used to rye bread or grain coffee, but having been on the run for all that time without anything to eat, he was grateful. Before he left, they brought out a telephone book that had a map in it and pointed out the route that he should follow. This house was just outside Slagelse, about 100 km from Copenhagen. After filling his collapsible water bottle, Don set off again, using the railway line as a guide.

Around 1:00 am April 22, Don was too tired to go any further. He unrolled the outer flying suit he was carrying and laid in a pile on the grass to sleep on it. It was a broken sleep with field mice running over him. Around 4:00 am he started off again. By this time, Don's feet had started to blister from the loose fitting flying boots and he was beginning to wonder if it was worth trying to make it or if he should just give himself up. It was around 7:00 am when he came across a small stream and decided to wash up. He had a mirror, a razor, soap, tin cup and a comb in his escape kit. Looking in the mirror, he was shocked to see that his face was caked with blood from several cuts. After a cold spring water wash and shave he felt refreshed, wrapped his feet with the heavy outer flying socks, secured them with strips of material from the parachute and started off again.

Walking in an easterly direction through the bush he came to the town of Soro. Keeping to the south, he circled the town, coming to a pile of sugar beets. He peeled one and ate a breakfast of sugar beet and dandelion leaves before resuming his journey. Around 8:30 he came across a farm house. Having had luck with the last farmer he decided to see if he could get some help there. He knocked on the door and a girl of about 15 answered. She said something in Danish, which he did not understand, and then her brother came to the door. Don used some sign language to indicate that he wanted to fill his water bottle. After looking up and down the road the boy pulled him inside. They sat him down at the table and brought some black bread and black coffee. Within half an hour Don was on his way with a fresh supply of water.

As he headed toward Ringsted the sun grew very hot and feet began to perspire and blister. He cut down into a gully in a farm, only to discover what appeared to be a German rifle range. Despite his sore feet, he ran as fast as he could out of the gully, crossed over a main roadway and into a pasture. He hid behind a manure pile, and very soon fell asleep. After a short nap he headed off again, forgetting his water bottle by the manure pile.

Bypassing Ringsted to the south, he approached a small white farmhouse and went to the yard where he saw a water pump. A man came out of the barn and took him to a tap at the house. After a bit of sign language the man seemed to realize that he was an escaping airman. He brought a beer and some carrots. Don ate some of the carrots and put the rest in his pockets for later, thanked the men and was soon on his way, once again following the railway tracks.

A few hours later, Don stopped for a rest at the top of a hill alongside the tracks. While he sat there, a small rabbit hopped over and stopped within reach of his arm. Don was tempted to reach out and grab it and make a meal of it. Seeing the little rabbit look up at him, he figured it had as much right to live as he did. So much for meat, and there sat Don and the rabbit as a train came rolling along, loaded with guns munitions, and every car guarded by German soldiers. He waved to the German soldiers and they waved back at him.

Don was starting to feel more confident that he could make it to Sweden and started walking down secondary roads and soon came to the town of Hoem. As he walked through the town, still in his uniform and could sense that people were staring at him, perhaps because the seat of his pants was ripped. There were a lot of people on the streets and he later learned it was their Easter holiday and they were headed for church. There were a number of bicycles parked outside the church and he was tempted to take one and save himself some walking, but his conscience got the better of him. He could not steal, especially from a churchyard. He headed for the bush and came across a stand of pine trees where he thought he should sit down and rest his feet for a while. No sooner did he sit down than it started to rain, so he headed into some thicker brush for protection. As he approached a small white house he was startled when a deer that jumped out in front of him and then ran into a thicket. He went up to the door and knocked. A middle-aged woman answered and, unable to speak English, she called to her husband. The man seemed to realize Don's predicament and hurried him into the house. Noticing the problem he was having with his feet, the woman fetched a basin of warm water and a towel. The footbath offered a bit of relief, but by now he had one huge blister on each foot, from the toes to part way up his heel. They sat him at the table and brought him some cheese sandwiches, liver roll and a beer. It felt good to have a nice meal, and before he left she brought him some more sandwiches to take with him.

He found it almost impossible to walk on his blistered feet and around 7:00 pm he noticed a small horse stable all by itself beside a peat bog and thought it looked like a good place to stop for the night. He went down to the pond for a wash and a shave and decided to cut the uppers off his flying boots to make a pair of shoes of them. As he was doing that, a man and two women came walking along the path beside the peat bog. The man noticed him immediately and sent the women away. Don could see that the man, Mr. George Rasmussen, recognized him as an Allied airman. After trying to make him understand where he wanted to go Mr. Rasmussen shook his head and indicated that there were a lot of Gestapo in the area. He led Don to the stable and with some sign language made it clear that he was to stay there until after 9:00 pm. Around 9:05 Don heard someone approaching. Twentyfive years later when Don met George Rasmussen again, George recounted the story about how he came through the door and was grabbed from behind and had a knife held to his throat. He was afraid for his life. Realizing who it was and that he was alone, Don released him. George had brought a roll of clothing consisting of an old pair of blue trousers, a civilian sweater, a knife and some other useful articles. He took off his own coat and rubber boots and gave them to Don. After changing into the new outfit Don handed his flying suit and heavy white sweater to George. Years later, George told Don through an interpreter that his wife had used the fabric from his battle dress and the wool from the sweater to make outfits and sweaters for the children.



Georg Rasmussen and Don, 1968

Having completed the exchange of clothing, George pointed to his watch and indicated that Don should not leave until 5:00 am. There was a curfew around Borup and anyone out during curfew hours would be shot on sight. After George left Don climbed into the horse feed trough and went to sleep. Waking up at 4:30 he went down to the pond to wash, shave and comb his hair. There was no food, so no reason to wait for breakfast. As he started up the road he was met once again by George Rasmussen who took him to his house where his wife had breakfast ready. They did not have much, but they were willing to share what they had. George was forced to dig peat for the Germans, and they did not pay well. While eating breakfast, George brought out a Shell road map. To show Don the route he should take. He marked swastikas to mark the places that were heavily guarded. As Don was getting ready to leave Mrs. Rasmussen handed him a package of sandwiches and George reached into his pockets and gave him all the money he had, 20.80 kr. Don had 40,000 francs in his escape kit, which he gave to George*. He knew they were no use to him at the time but hoped that when the war ended George would be able to exchange them.

*George Rasmussen gave the 40.000 to the British Army after the war. Luckily he kept one, which his son now has at Sofievej 7, 4600 Køge. The son Leif was with his father at the peat bog and saw Don.

As Don set off, George accompanied him as far as the main road that he was to follow. It was easier travelling in civilian clothes, but the rubber boots aggravated the blisters. By 10 am he had travelled quite a way to the northeast. He came across a farmhouse where he saw a man raking leaves. Once again using sign language he indicated that he needed water. The man's wife appeared and beckoned him into the house where he also met the son and daughter. While looking over the map the woman brought coffee and milk and she and her husband pointed out the route that he should take to Taastrup, and off he went again, this time to the north east. When he reached the main road he was tempted to stop at a small café and use some of the money that George had given him to buy some food but was afraid. He had had good luck with farmers but did not want to risk being turned in. He kept walking in the hot sun but thought that he should look for a place to stay in the country rather than waiting until Taastrup. When did stop for a rest his feet were so swollen that he could not remove the boots.

As he neared Taastrup he went into a farmyard hoping to find some food and a place to sleep. The house and barns were surrounded by a high brick fence. He entered the courtyard (Kanehøjgård, Køgevej 275 in Taastrup, now demolished), went up to the house and knocked on the kitchen door. It was April 23, Good Friday, and he had walked close to 100 km from the spot where his plane had crashed. When the farmer opened the door Don could see about a dozen people sitting at a long table. It appeared that the man's whole family was there for Easter dinner. The man, Thorvald Soerensen, invited him in and seated him in the middle of his guests. Don felt very self-conscious. After walking so far in the heat and having slept on a manure pile he knew that his clothes smelled bad. After a hearty meal he was asked many questions in broken French and English "When will the war end? Where will the Allies strike next?" He could not answer, but assured them that the day was getting close. Because there were so many people at the house Mr. Soerensen could not risk having him stay there.

In 1968, Joergen Helme knocked on their door and asked them if they had helped an Allied airman 1943. They answered cautiously "Why do you ask?" When Joergen told them Don was in the car they went running out and hugged him with tears in their eyes. Thorvald said that just that morning his wife had wondered what had happened to the airman that had come that night.



It was in Taastrup that Don had his first encounter with the Germans. There were everywhere on the streets and in transport headed toward Copenhagen. They looked at him suspiciously, so he headed to the fields again. It was not long before he came to a small shelter beside a stream (Store Vejleå, Taastrup). He was able to remove his boots, but only with great difficulty and a lot of pain. He washed his feet and soaked them in the cool water. After a few hours of rest he looked for a better place to sleep. He soon came to a farmhouse beside a wood and two elderly men came toward him. He tried to make them understand that he was looking for a place to sleep. They pointed out the route he should take and accompanied him for a half hour. After passing through the town of Hersted he headed up a small country road. It was almost dark as he approach a large hay stack in a field next to a farm house (Lerbækgård, Risby. Only a small building left. Now part of Vestskoven) and he decided to just go right up to the house. A middle aged woman, answered the door but she could not speak English so she called her husband, Mr. L.C. Pedersen. With the aid of an English-Danish dictionary they told him that there were children in the house and that he must not be seen by them. Mr. Pedersen went to the phone. Don was worried, He didn't know who the man was calling, whether it was a friend or the authorities.

As it turned out, Mr. Pedersen had phoned Mr. Marborg, a local schoolteacher who was in the Resistance movement. Mr. Marborg spoke English fluently and put him at ease. Mrs. Pedersen made sandwiches and coffee, which went down very well. They made plans for the next leg of the journey after which Don was given some blankets and shown to the hayloft where he was to stay until morning. Mr. Marborg instructed him to meet him the next morning at the train station in Glostrup, about 5 km away.

His sleep that night was interrupted by mice running over the blankets and he finally got up at 4:30, Mr Pedersen was there with a flashlight that he held while Don washed and shaved, and then he helped Don bandage his feet. He had brought some sandwiches and gave them to Don as he prepared to leave, along with all the change he had in his pockets.

Don thanked him for the help and started off to Glostrup. The instructions were very good and he made it there in a little over an hour and found Mr. Marborg waiting for him.

Mr. Marborg had already purchased the train tickets and they boarded the train just before it was to leave and arrived at the main Copenhagen within minutes. The station was full of German soldiers, so they went outside to wait for the next train north to Helsingoer. Just a few minutes before departure time they went in and board the train. There were guards on all the rail bridges along the way to try to prevent the Resistance from blowing them up. On arrival in Helsingoer they immediately headed for the ferry dock. Every half hour a ferry would leave for Sweden carrying troops and munitions. It was hopeless to try to get on one of them because they were guards every step of the way. They decided instead to walk up the coast to try to find a row boat, but soon found that the boats were all under the control of the Germans. The oars had been removed, and the boats that they did see were either locked up or protected by machine guns. It was almost noon, so they sat down and ate some sandwiches. Sweden was only two miles away, but the water was cold and rough, and having already lost 25 pounds over the last three days, Don was in no condition to try to swim across.



At 12:30 Mr. Marborg had to leave and get back to Glostrup before someone reported him. Once again Don was on his own. He started to walk through a park with some apartment building on it, only to find that it was a German barracks. He quickly turned around and headed back toward the coast where he spotted some boats, but as he neared them he spotted a German soldier with an automatic rifle. He continued up the road until he got to the town of Hornbaek. He turned back when it started to rain and walked toward the ferry dock, but when he got there and saw all those guards he realized it would be impossible. As darkness came it was time to look for shelter to escape from the rain. He came across a beach house and, finding the doors unlocked, went in. After eating the last sandwich and a Horlicks tablet he laid down to get some sleep. (Horlicks tablets were malted milk tablets, a high energy food that was included in escape kits.) In the early hours of the morning he was awakened when the door opened and a guard looked inside, but the door closed and the guard left,

The morning April 25 was bright and sunny but clouds were gathering in the west and before long it started to rain. Don had no food left and there was no choice but to look for help. After walking up and down the beach between Helsingoer and Aalsgaarde looking in vain for a boat he was starting to wonder whether he should just give himself up. Then he spotted a house on the beach that was flying a Danish flag and surmised they were true Danes. He walked up to the side door and knocked. A young lady opened the door and to Don's delight, she spoke English, but she said that they had no boat and that they could not help. As he left, a young man came running out and took him back to the house. They cooked a small meal, which he really appreciated and living on sandwiches for the last few days. After dinner they listened to the BBC news. He thanked them for their hospitality and headed back to his beach house.

The next day was much nicer as Don headed once more up the road toward Aalsgaarde and came across a man who looked like a fisherman. The man spoke no English but was able to communicate that the Germans had taken his boat. Exhausted and frustrated, he decided that he would try one more house and if he could not find help he would give

himself up. He went up to a house and rang the doorbell, but there was no answer. As he turned away he looked across the street and saw a man reading a newspaper in a small sun porch. He knocked on the side door (Nordre Strandvej 206, Aalsgaarde) and was met by a middle aged woman, Mrs. Dalsborg, who spoke fluent English. Don explained his predicament and she called her husband, who took him inside and locked all the doors. Mrs. Dalsborg told him that she had spent four years in England, and that they had three small children staying with them. It would much to risky for him to stay there. She cooked a meal of meat and eggs along with cake and coffee. After dinner they offered him the use of their bath, which he really needed. After cleaning up he was shown to a bedroom and told to get some rest. As fatigued as he was, he could not sleep. As he laid in bed the door suddenly opened and an excited Mr. Dalsborg came in shouting "You will go to Sweden." and then disappeared.

A while later a distinguished looking gentleman came into the room. He spoke fluent English and Don learned that he was married to the daughter of a Major Barson who lived in London. He asked for some identification, but Don had lost his pay book when his plane was shot down. He was later to learn that it had been found at the crash site and turned over to the resistance. However, Don still had some of the things that he had cut off his uniform and was still wearing his long underwear that he wore when flying, and it had a "Made in Britain" label on it. He was sure that he had convinced them that he was who he said he was, they told him to stay there and they would come back for him. Later that evening, another gentleman, Major Flemming Muus - chief of sabotage and underground, came to interrogate him. The major told him that they would try to get in touch with Intelligence in London by radio and confirm his story. Then he pulled out a snub nosed revolver and said, "You know what we will have to do if we cannot contact London. There are a lot of lives at stake." Don spent the rest of the evening listening to the radio and praying that they would be able to reach London.

After a sleepless night Don got up and was given a breakfast of bacon and eggs. He was also given a change of clothes that consisted of a pair of plus fours, shoes and clean socks. He got the good news that the major had been able to contact London and confirm his story. Mr. Barson came to take Don to his house. They went by taxi to the next town and after sure that they had not been followed they boarded a train, travelling just a short distance and taking another taxi to within a few blocks of Barson's home in Charlottenlund. They walked the rest of the way. There, Don met Mr. Barson's English born wife. The next day Mrs. Barson took Don out shopping for groceries and taught him a few Danish words that she thought he should know. He stayed with the Barsons for three days. One evening they were invited out to dinner at a friend's home. The host had owned an engine plant but had burned it down one night to deprive the Germans of his product.

On the evening of April 29 Mr. Barson came home and announced that Don could leave for Sweden that night, but did not say how. Once again they went by taxi and train a few miles up the coast to Skodsborg, about 8 miles from the Swedish coast. Arriving at a large house he was introduced to some young men and women from the Resistance. When he emptied his pockets of all unnecessary items one of the girls asked if she could have the silk maps from his escape kit. That was Sylvia Tjoern (code name Gertha).

As it turned out, they were unable to get a boat that night, so Don stayed with Ejner and Sylvia Tjoern for the night. Don went back to visit Sylvia and Ejner in 1977. Sylvia

recognized him immediately. She pointed to the silk map hanging on her wall, and he learned at that time that their home was used as the headquarters for the Resistance. The radio that was used to contact London was hidden under their steps.

The next morning Sylvia and Tjoern and Phyllis Barson took Don for a sightseeing trip of Copenhagen. While riding a streetcar a German officer sat in the seat just ahead of theirs. Sylvia stood up and said with a strong English accent, "Let's move, I am not going to sit next to a German" and she moved to the back of the car. They went for lunch at the Hotel d'Angleterre, one of the best restaurants, and a favourite of the German officers. There, much to Don's surprise, he saw women smoking cigars. They went back to the big white house in Skodsborg where six Resistance workers were assembling a two man kayak and Don was

introduced to Lars Troen, a Danish Resistance worker who had just escaped from the Gestapo after being accused of sabotage. He had pretended to be sick and was taken to a hospital from which he made his escape. Don, Lars and Sylvia then went to the police



headquarters where he met Captain Basse and Sergeant Malling to get identification papers. They were given instructions on what to do if approached by a German patrol boat and were given a flashlight with a blue lens, the colour for the day. The police officers also gave him some pictures of Copenhagen. One of the pictures was the Shellhuset, Gestapo headquarters, where they kept and tortured prisoners from the Resistance. The captain said that when Don made it back to England to tell them that they wanted it bombed. He mentioned that the prisoners were kept on the top floor and they should try to hit the bottom floor only, which would require the planes to come in at roof top level. That raid was not carried out until two years later.



Lars Troen 1987

After leaving police headquarters, Don, Lars and Sylvia went for a tour of Copenhagen and saw the Little Mermaid. From there they headed back up to Skodsborg where Don met another Resistance worker, Chris Hanson, who spent the whole time of the occupation as a full time Resistance worker, usually disguised himself as a police officer. He was taken in twice by the Gestapo but managed to get away both times. They went down to the beach where Chris pointed out where they had to go. Then they passed the rest of the afternoon in the shade of a tree at an outdoor café and drank a few beers. Chris took a picture of Don and Lars looking over to Sweden with smiles on their faces.



Lars Troen, Chris Hansen and Don 1943



Don and Chris Hansen 1968

They returned to the house to find the kayak ready and waiting. Don had never paddled a kayak before but Lars told him not to worry because he knew how. Around 11:00 pm they carried the kayak down to the beach at Skodsborg Strandvej 224. While they prepared to set off, another Resistance worker, Mrs. L. A. Duus Hansen approached the Danish beach guards and started to talk to them. Then she lit up a cigarette. The flare of the

match blinded them temporarily, long enough for Don and Lars to push off. Lars was an excellent paddler and Don had some difficulty getting into rhythm with him. About a mile out, Lars stopped paddling and turned around. He held out a bottle of Aquavit and said, "Take a good swig of this." It was Don's first taste of schnapps.

The water in the Sound between Denmark and Sweden is very cold and has a strong current and heavy swells. This proved a blessing for Don and Lars when a patrol boat appeared to be heading in their direction with its searchlight sweeping over the surface of the water. They stopped paddling and crouched low. Just as the light was about to sweep over them they dropped into a swell and the light passed right over their heads. Within a few minutes the patrol boat was gone and they continued paddling. Don was starting to feel comfortable with his paddling and thought that he might actually be helping Lars. After about three hours they passed the Swedish island of Ven and were out of Danish territory. Rather than land on the island, Lars decided to go a little further along the coast to a point where the Swedes had left a stretch of the beach without barbed wire. They finally landed around 3 am. After beaching the kayak, Don used his dagger to cut holes below the water line and pushed it back out, but it did not sink. Afraid to walk on the main road, they circled inland and came into Helsingborg from the east and reported to

the British Legation where they met Mr. Crew. They found out the next day that there had been no need to sink the kayak or to avoid the main roads because the police had been notified that they were coming. One of the policemen went to the beach to retrieve the kayak, took it home and repaired it for his own use.

Mr Crew took Don and Lars to his home, driving in a charcoal powered car. He made a big breakfast for them. He gave them each a pair of socks and shoes to replace those that had been soaked on the trip over. He instructed them on what they were to do next and then drove them downtown to the police station.

Having arrived in civilian clothes, Don was charged with entering Sweden illegally and was put in jail. Had he arrived in uniform he would have been interned for the duration of the war. The police treated Don and Lars very well, making sure they were comfortable. and even went Don some English books to read. After two days in jail, Don was given an identification card and released with the condition that he report to the police station daily at 11:00 am. Mr. Crew was there to meet him and took him to a clothing store where he got a new shirt, some socks and underwear. In the afternoon he was told that the Crown Prince Gustav Adolf and his wife were staying at the Grand Hotel and, having been informed of Don's escape, would like to meet him. When he entered their room he saw them sitting in chairs side by side, just as he would expect to see British royalty. He proceeded to within a few feet of them, bowed and waited for them to speak first. Both the prince and princess put out their hands out for him to shake and the prince asked him to sit down, and they chatted for about half an hour. The prince was very interested to hear about how he had managed to escape. Even though he was a prince, Don could tell them only that they came by kayak.

After his visit to the prince Don was at a loss as to what to do. He did not feel comfortable in country that allowed German troops to use their railways and to walk about their streets. Mr. Crew came to his rescue and introduced him to Lt. Iacobi of the Royal Swedish Air Force and told him that it was okay to accept his invitation to dinner. They went to the Savoy and had a long talk. The Swedish officer was very interested in what type of aircraft the British had, but Don was careful not to give much information.

On the morning of May 4 Don went down for breakfast where he met Lars who had just been released. They were later introduced to Mr. Ware, a Danish rug merchant who had earlier escaped to Sweden in a fishing boat. He was having a dinner party for some of the Helsingborg dignitaries and invited Don and Lars. Don was reluctant to go in the clothes he had but Mr. Ware insisted. When they arrived at the Grand Hotel for dinner there were about 30 people dressed in dinner jackets or dress uniforms. Don was seated across from a high-ranking German officer with Lars as his translator. The dinner lasted from 7 until 11 pm and liquor flowed like water. Lars and Don weren't sure how they were going to make it back to their hotel. The Grand offered them a room, but they declined. They thanked Mr. Ware for the hospitality and staggered back to their hotel.

When they reported to the police station the next morning they were informed that they were being transported to Stockholm on the night train. That night, eight policemen took them out to dinner and presented them each with a gold cuff link as a memento of their stay. While waiting at the train station they met an Allied air crew who had ditched on the Swedish coast and were being sent to an internment camp.

Don was free to wander around Stockholm and did not have to report to the police as he had in Helsingborg. He visited the British Consulate where he was given some money for his hotel and to buy some souvenirs. The Swedes had been generous with ration coupons so he had no problems getting whatever he wanted in restaurants. Lars introduced Don to a Danish count who was living out the war in Sweden. They spent the day having a few drinks and visited the casino.

On May 9 Don went back to the consulate and met S/Ldr Fleet, and seeing the condition of Don's clothes went and got him a suit. He also informed Don that he would have to get out of Sweden or be interned, which would have been automatic had he arrived in uniform. He and Lars declared themselves refugees from Denmark. The next night, Mary O'Connor, who worked at the consulate accompanied them to the cinema to see "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". The next morning he was told to be ready to catch a plane to England, but at the last minute it was cancelled and the whole day was wasted.

The following day he was on standby for a plane and waited in the hotel until a member of the consulate came to pick him up. At 8 pm they boarded a diplomatic courier plane, a DC3 G-AGGA for Scotland. There were a number of young men on the flight with them, mostly Danes and Norwegians who had escaped from the Germans and were on their way to join the British. There were scheduled flights from Stockholm to Scotland during the war. Most of the time the Germans let them go, but a few had been shot down. The route was straight west, flying between the North end of Jutland and the southern tip of Norway, and it was at that point that spot that they could see anti aircraft fire to their starboard, but too far away to do them any harm.

In the early morning of May 13 they landed at Leuchars on the east coast of Scotland. After having a week of freedom in Sweden Don was disappointed at his reception. Because he had no identification papers he was assigned a guard who went everywhere with him. The food was also a disappointment, after all the good food he had had in Sweden. While waiting for an afternoon train they were sent to watch a movie to pass the time. At 8:00 pm they boarded a train to Edinburg and then south to London.

Upon arrival in London Don was escorted to the RAF Intelligence headquarters where he was interrogated all day. He told them about the request by the Copenhagen police chief to bomb the Gestapo headquarters and was able to point out the location on the pictures he had been given by the Resistance. He was issued with new identification papers and was allowed to leave on his own. He wandered over to the Beaver Club where he surprised some of his old friends from 402 Squadron. They had heard that he was missing and were surprised to see him in civilian clothes. Later on, a few of them accompanied Don to Covent Garden and visited his favourite pub, the Kings Arms. The pub owner almost fainted when she saw him and that night the drinks were on the house.

The next morning, Don returned to Intelligence for a few more hours of questioning., and in the afternoon he attended RCAF headquarters to get some money. He was politely told that D.V. Smith was missing and had a hard time convincing them that he was alive and well and standing in front of them. They advanced him some money but would not issue him a new uniform because he already had one issued. They seemed not to believe that he had left that one in Denmark. It was not until a few days later that he was able to scrounge a new one from the RAF. He had been told to report to Liverpool to get a boat back to Canada for a one month leave, but he would not have been allowed on the ship

unless he was in uniform. Before departure he went to visit Charles Woodbine Parish's parents and told them the unfortunate news about their son.

He boarded the Empress of Scotland at Liverpool and seven days later landed at Halifax, then went by train to Toronto. Arriving at the Main Station he thought that he should call home first, but his mother was not home when called, so by the time she got home he was sitting in the living room. His mother almost fainted when she saw him, and his father said "I told you he would be alright."

While home on leave that Don went to visit his aunt and uncle and met their neighbour's 18 year old daughter, Helen Brown. He had to return to England but was not allowed to fly operational missions. On his return he was invested with the DFM for of his escape from occupied Denmark, the first Allied airman to do so. In 1944 he was sent back to Canada. He and Helen married just before he was posted to OTU 5 at Boundary Bay in British Columbia where he was a flight instructor on B25 bombers. He was released from the air force after the end of the war and pursued a career in the aircraft business, working for Avro, Orenda Engines and Canadian Steel Improvements where he worked on high temperature precision casting of alloys to make turbine blades for the Iroquois engine that was to power the Avro Arrow. When that project was cancelled he was recruited by Union Carbide and a few years later was transferred to their Welland Ontario plant eventually becoming Superintendent of Production. Over the years he was involved with various Air Cadet squadrons. He held the rank of Major and served as commanding officer of 23 Sqdn. (St.Catharines) and was actively involved with the Air Cadet of Canada and helped to establish their glider flying program.