

 [Sigurd var syv år, da bombefly faldt ned på marken: - Journalist fra Australien besøgte ham forud for rund mindedag | jv.dk](#) Af Henriette Pilegaard henpi@jfm.dk i [JydskeVestkysten](#) 28. januar 2024.

Sigurd was 7 years old when a bomber crashed into the field – Reporter from Australia visited him before commemoration day

Translation without photos – see the 4 photos in the edition in Danish and the captions here.

1 Sigurd Krogh Sørensen, to the right, grew up on Pommersgaard in Mjels where as a seven-year-old he saw one of the Allied bombers crashing into the field 300 metres behind the farmhouse. Here he just has received the Australian reporter Jacquelin Magnay when she was on a tour of Als with Bjørn Allerelli Andersen, chairman of Air Force Memorial Center Als, and others. Photo: Henriette Pilegaard.

In the night before 29 January 1944 four Allied bombers crashed in the area of Alssund. Sigurd Krogh Sørensen in Mjels was 7 years old, and he was recently visited by a reporter from a newspaper in Australia which brings a big article on the occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the crash.

By Henriette Pilegaard henpi@jfm.dk in [JydskeVestkysten](#) 28 January 2024.

South Jutland: Sigurd Krogh Sørensen was just 7 years old that night in January. Now he is 87, but he remembers it clearly.

- In 1944 there were many bombers. I thought they were German. We were in the basement of the house.

He is sitting in the garden room of Pommersgaard in Mjels on the northern part of Als, telling of the past. The present farmhouse was built in 1877 by his Grandfather. Today the farm is run by Sigurd and Lisa's son, but the married couple still live in the farmhouse and keep a fine ornamental garden.

In the garden room Sigurd tells his story in English to an Australian reporter. It is not the first time he is visited by travellers from far-away countries who would like to hear about his experiences in 1944.

Unknown in Australia

That night at about 2.30 a.m. there was suddenly a lot of noise.

- Windows in the house broke and plates fell off the roof. I was afraid that the plane would crash into the house. My father grabbed me, and then we saw flames in the field behind the farmhouse. In the morning my Dad walked up there. I was scared.

2 In the garden room of Pommersgaard Sigurd Krog Sørensen spoke to Jacquelin Magnay, correspondent of The Australian, in English when he told her of his experiences as a seven-year-old in 1944. In the background Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Jens Peter Rasmussen, chairman of The Contact Committee for Military Traditions in the Sønderborg Area. Photo: Henriette Pilegaard.

The guest is reporter Jacquelin Magnay. She is correspondent of *The Australian* and lives in London. From there she covers Europe and part of the Middle East.

Two nieces of the Australian airman John Tree, who drowned with his parachute in Alssund in January 1944, visited Als some years ago. Through the nieces the Australian medium has become aware that people in South Jutland still commemorate the many airmen from the Allied forces who lost their lives on the missions to Germany.

-In Australia hardly anybody knows about it, so people are amazed and moved that so many in Denmark know the history and commemorate the fallen, Jacquelin Magnay states.

Her visit to Denmark took place in June last year, and her report was published on Saturday in a magazine in the national newspaper *The Australian* on the occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the 4 lost bombers in the area of Alssund.

Four crashes the same night

At the end of the occupation the number of English and American planes over Denmark increased. Most of them were bombers heading for targets in Germany, but there were also planes that laid mines at sea or dropped supplies to the Danish resistance movement. More than 440 planes with more than 1100 Allied airmen – they were also from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Poland – were shot down and killed over Denmark. In the Sønderborg area 12 Allied bombers crashed or made a forced landing after being shot down, a number of them with Australian crew members.

The day of Jacquelin Magnay's tour started with a short reception by the Mayor of Sønderborg, Erik Lauritzen, at Sandbjerg Slot, and then she visited Aabenraa Cemetery where there is a plot for about 150 crashed Allied airmen.

On the way the route went through Varnæs. North of the village Lancaster JB412 crashed in the night before 29 January 1944. This night there was a total of 4 crashes over South Jutland. A Halifax crashed at Klipleve while the last two fell down after a collision in the air over Als. It was Lancaster JA967 that crashed at Broballe on the northern part of Als, and Lancaster HK537 that crashed at Mjels near Pommersgaard. Therefore the tour for the Australian reporter also went to the northern part of Als with the ferry from Ballebro.

Knowledge disappears

Air Force Memorial Center Als was in charge of the tour with the Australian reporter. It was in cooperation with The Contact Committee for Military Traditions in the Sønderborg Area. The committee falls under the Army Home Guard District which after the Army NCO School closed in 2014 took charge of coordinating memorial ceremonies with wreathlaying ceremonies for fallen in the area in the wars since 1848.

Air Force Memorial Center Als was founded as an association four years ago supported by the Municipality of Sønderborg. Chairman Bjørn Allerelli Andersen states about the purpose:

-Residents of the areas where the planes crashed were generally very respectful, and in many cases they took care of both survivors and perished airmen from the crashes. However, today most people do not know how many of the Allied airmen who actually died, and we'll make that more known. Now we have about 90 members, and among them are all descendants of the crew members in question that we know of. We appreciate that support.

Not like the rest of Denmark

The head of the Contact Committee is Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Jens Peter Rasmussen, Chief of the Army NCO School in Sønderborg 1999-2005 and after that Chief of Army Home Guard District South Jutland. Now he makes his contribution as a volunteer. There is a small military museum at the barracks in Sønderborg, which was closed as a NCO School in 2014. Now they work as a house for associations. The museum, the historical collection of the barracks, also has a section about World War II.

-Because South Jutland became a part of Germany in 1864, the area is not like the rest of Denmark, states Jens Peter Rasmussen, born and grown up on Kegnæs on the southern part of Als.

Planes from the Allied forces came in big formations over South Jutland, mostly in the evenings and at night. People can still tell about that, and many have heard about it from their ancestors. It was not always simple. Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany, and in South Jutland there were also a number of pro-German people who did not want the bombers to reach their targets in Germany.

-Therefore there were also spies from the Allied who were sent out of the planes and landed by parachute. And when there were survivors from crashed Allied planes, some of them refused to accept the help offered by Danes. If you were caught hiding Allied airmen, you would be punished severely by the Germans, and there was a long way from South Jutland before you could escape to Sweden, Bjørn Allerelli Andersen says.

Found a deceased airman

In Mjels Sigurd Krogh Sørensen is by now one of the very few eyewitnesses to the crashes.

-In the morning my father went into the field. Police and German soldiers also arrived. They went up to the plane, took the bodies and laid them in the engine house in Broballe. We did not know how many there were, states Sigurd.

There were 14 men in the two Lancasters that collided, and no survivors were found. Later the crew that crashed at Pommersgaard proved to consist of three Australians, three Englishmen and a Canadian.

-My father walked up there and removed pieces of wreckage, and when he was working in the field a couple of weeks later, he found one more of the crew. However, he did not want Germans on the farm again, so the body was buried 50 metres from the crash site. After the war a Canadian priest came and held a service. Then there were 1,000 people here, Sigurd recalls.

3 In the yard of Pommersgaard where Sigurd Krogh Sørensen grew up and still lives, the propeller blade has been erected in memory of Sergeant Bull from the Allied plane that crashed behind the farmhouse in 1944. The inscription on the propeller blade reads: "An English airman rests honourably here far from his home and his loved ones. 29 January 1944." Private photo.

A propeller blade was erected over the grave. Today it is situated on a lawn at Sigurd and Lisa's yard.

-My mother had also planted a tree – a weeping willow – behind the tree in the field, and every Saturday fresh flowers were laid, Sigurd recalls, but he is not certain when the grave was moved.

Englishmen moved the mortal remains to the cemetery in Aabenraa. An Identity Disc from an 18-year-old, Sergeant Francis Charles William Bull, had been found.

A great comfort

Later a number of families of the deceased airmen have visited Als. Bull's father, mother, and sister came from England, and relatives have also taken the long journey from Australia. In 1997 a Danish memorial was placed in Memorial Park in Sydney, Australia, supported financially by the Danfoss Museum. It was a stone, 35 kg, that Sigurd Krogh Sørensen found in the field at Pommersgaard where the plane fell – more than 16,000 km away. The stone is a part of a memorial wall with stones for every country Australians fought in. Sigurd and Lisa travelled to Australia where they have seen the memorial wall. They told that to the Australian reporter and showed her pictures.

After the visit to Lisa and Sigurd Jacquelin Magnay's tour went on towards Broballe where the other Lancaster JA967 had crashed. Residents of the area have erected memorial stones. A memorial ceremony for crews of the two planes will be held on Monday 29 January 2024 at 1. p.m. followed by a common coffee table at Oksbøl Friskole.

Jacquelin's tour in June went on to Englændergraven – The Englishmen's Grave – in Nørreskoven. Near the forest two Halifax planes from England collided in the air after a bombing raid on Kiel, and all 14 airmen onboard were killed. One plane was Canadian while the other was from the Royal Australian Air Force. The pieces of wreckage were scattered over a large area, while parts of bodies as far as possible were collected by Danes and buried in the mound in the forest with a propeller blade from one of the planes as a memorial. After the war the contents of the grave were taken to Aabenraa Cemetery.

-It is a great comfort to relatives and descendants back home in Australia that Danes have been so solicitous, states Jacquelin Magnay.

4 Every year on 29 January people gather on Næsvej between Broballe and Mjels to commemorate the two English planes that crashed in 1944. Here 14 Allied airmen lost their lives, among them 3 Australians. Archive photo: Timo Battefeld.

They are still remembered

In many places in South Jutland there are annual memorial ceremonies to the crews of crashed Allied planes.

There are ceremonies to the two Lancaster planes that crashed near Broballe on the northern part of Als in the night before 29 January 1944 when 14 English and Australia airmen lost their lives.

The ceremony is at memorial stones erected by residents of the area at the 50th Anniversary in 1994 with the names of the 14 deceased.

On the website airmen.dk you can find information about Allied planes and airmen shot down over Denmark during World War II. Here you may also gather information by clicking on maps of Denmark.

Air Force Memorial Center Als has the website afmca.dk