

# HALIFAX II DT620 SHOT DOWN OVER THE BALTIC SEA OFF STEVNS ON 14 MARCH 1943



2020

The plane belonged to Royal Air Force 138 Squadron, Bomber Command, coded NF-T. It took off at 17:50 from Tempsford on an SOE mission to drop Zone Wrona 614 in Poland.



On Air Station Kastrup Staffelfkapitän Oberleutnant Martin Drewes of 7th Night Fighter Squadron was alerted by the officer on duty at radar station "Seehund" near Tybjerg at the centre of Zealand who reported that a number of enemy planes were crossing Zealand from west to east at a low height. At this height the radar was unable to help the night fighter, so he could only give the course of the planes. Shortly after take-off with his Bf 110 coded D5+DR Drewes spotted a Halifax at a height of 200 metres and he opened fire at a distance of 80 metres. After a short burst the Halifax caught fire, exploded in the air and fell into the sea off Harvig at 21:42. It fell into the water, 8 metres deep, 200 metres off the coast east of fisherman Jens Hansen's house.

Squadron Leader/Oberleutnant Martin Drewes was no. 8 of Germany's highest scoring flying aces.

The crew of DT620 comprised: Pilot Flight Sergeant Leslie R. Smith, 2nd pilot Sgt Horace R. Harrap RNZAF, Navigator/Air Bomber Sgt Colin F. Chambers, Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Sgt Donald R. Ross RCAF, Air Gunner Flight Sgt Eugene S. Masson RCAF, and Flight Engineer Sgt Arthur C. Sixsmith and Air Gunner Sgt Thomas Mairs. All perished. Halifax DT620 of 138 Squadron RAF was on a secret "Operation Slate" for the SOE (Special Operations Executive) deep in Poland, where it was to drop 6 containers and 6 packages to the Polish resistance movement. There were only a few instructions to the pilot: (a) Area: Poland, (b) Pinpoint: Point 614, (c) Alternative Pinpoint: Point 607, (d) Action if Pinpoint not located: Return, (e) Reception arrangements: Normal Polish flashing "P", (f) A/C's Recognition Signal to Reception: "B". The mission was guarded with so much security that it is still impossible to search details of it in the archives of the RAF. On the previous day 13 March the plane with the same crew had been on the SOE "Operation Cockle 2" to France.

On its flight from Tempsford Air Base in England it crossed Denmark.



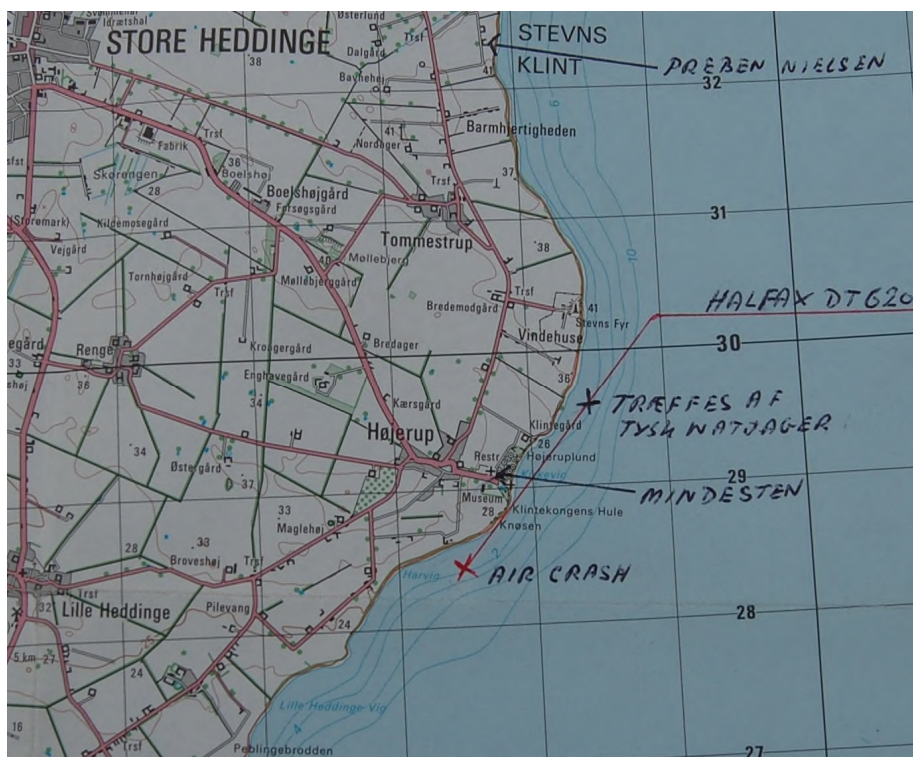
On 16 March the "Stevns Avisen" had this:  
*Aerial battle at the cliff.*

*On Sunday evening many residents of Stevns witnessed an aerial battle between an English and a German plane that met at the cliff between Rødvig and Højerup. The English plane was hit and crashed, burning, into the sea a few hundred metres off Højerup. The Police patrol boat from Rødvig soon arrived, but the plane had sunk nearly immediately. The battle was also seen from Store Heddinge, and the motor fire-engine was sent out, as they did not know where the plane had crashed. On Monday morning pieces of wreckage and the bodies of two airmen of the crew washed ashore*

*At "Højklint" near Tommestrup the brothers Preben and Henry Nielsen, 9 and 19, hear the noise from planes and they hurry into the garden to see what is happening. Preben Nielsen relates, "I remember it clearly. It was moonlit and the Halifax was flying at a height of about 150 metres from the east towards the cliff at Stevns Lighthouse where it turns and follows the cliff. Here a fierce shooting starts which shortly after finished when the Halifax was hit by fire from the German plane. The plane at once burst into flames and disappeared behind the cliff where it crashed into the water off Harvig. The tracer bullets came rushing towards us and hit the strawstacks, so we had to run for our lives. I recollect that afterwards there was a vapour of evaporated fuel in the air. I remember that the German pilot visited Stevns the following day to see where the plane had crashed."*



*After this dramatic experience Henry cycled to Harvig and went down to the beach. At 00:30 he found a body washed ashore here. It was one of the Canadians, either Ross or Masson, who apparently got out of the plane alive. He either drowned or froze to death in the ice-cold water.*



*At Lykkebro near Klippinge Frede Dahl, who was then the apprentice of a carpenter, had just come to his room, when he heard the noise of an aerial battle. At once he looked out of the*



*window and saw a sea of flames like an explosion. All of it lasted a couple of minutes. Then it was over. The following day he read in the newspaper that two bodies were washed ashore.*

Sgt Chambers is buried in Fjellie, Sweden. His body was found washed ashore near Villa Haga in Bjärred between Malmö and Landskrona on 4 May 1930 at 20.30 hrs. He was found entangled in lines from a parachute, but without a parachute. His body was there during the night guarded by the military from the local barracks. Next morning his body was examined by the local police, laid into a coffin and taken to the local chapel of rest in Fjellie. Chambers was buried in Fjellie Cemetery on 26 May 1943 with full military honours. Army chaplain E. Eberhard officiated at the graveside ceremony.

On 15 March 1943 at 00.30 hrs. a body was found on the beach near Jens Hansen's house. At 06.30 hrs. another airman was found near that place. Both of the perished airmen were taken to Rødvig and handed over to the German Wehrmacht which took them to Air Station Kastrup. It must have been Masson and Ross who were buried in Copenhagen in Bispebjerg Cemetery on 19 March 1943 at 11.00 hrs. An Evangelical priest officiated at the graveside ceremony attended by the staff of the Swiss consulate in Copenhagen.

Oberstleutnant and Commander of the air station Volbehr ordered the funeral. The funeral procession was led by Oberleutnant Gombert. He was joined by one unteroffizier and 4 private soldiers from Air Station Company Kastrup and one unteroffizier and 8 private soldiers from the Zealand Anti-Aircraft Unit, and 1 ensign and 8 men from "Ln-stelle". They were dressed in their daily uniforms without overcoat, with helmet and guns, no gas masks. Unteroffizier Ernst from the photo unit was present and took 3 photos which were later placed in the files of the deceased. "Verwaltungsdienst der Fl.H.Kdtr. L Kastrup" procured two wreaths for the graves. The coffins were carried into the chapel of Bispebjerg Cemetery and from there by "Untergruppe Seeland" to the open graves and lowered into them. Oberleutnant Gombert led the firing of a salute of honour when the coffins had been lowered into the graves.

On 21 March a body was washed ashore near Rødvig. The Danish police were called and the body was taken to the hospital in Store Heddinge. The body was severely mutilated. It was dressed in a uniform with three angles and a gold crown on its right upper arm. It also wore the mark RAS in gold. On 22 March it was reported that the body had been fetched by the Wehrmacht. It must have been Sgt Smith who was laid to rest in Bispebjerg Cemetery on 26 March 1943.



Air Gunner Sergeant Thomas Mairs,  
Royal Air Force

On 29 March a fisherman took the body of an airman to Rødvig Harbour. The Wehrmacht had hired some fishermen to find the wreckage of the plane at sea and the body had been found during the search. It was the body of F/Sgt Harrap who was laid to rest



2nd pilot Sgt Horace R. Harrap, Royal  
New Zealand Air Force

in Bispebjerg Cemetery on 7 April 1943.

On 14 April fisherman Jens Hansen found another body which was taken to Store Heddinge Hospital. The same day it was fetched by the staff of the headquarters of Air Station Kastrup. Sgt Sixsmith was buried in Bispebjerg Cemetery on 19 April 1943.

According to Danish police reports the body of Sgt Mairs was washed ashore on 23 April 1943 at Harvig, taken to Store Heddinge Hospital and identified by his discs, and a driving license found on him. He was collected from there by the Germans. 100% documentation is missing for the next step. However, the burial register of Bispebjerg Cemetery states that in grave no. 10-6-129 rests an "Unknown English airman (found 24 April 1943). Crashed in an aircraft, shot down, drowned. Buried on 28 April 1943." The same man!?!  
Sgt Mairs is still commemorated as unknown at the Runnymede Memorial!



The crew of Halifax II DT620 rest near each other in Bispebjerg Cemetery. Back row from the left: Masson, Ross, Smith and Harrap. Front row: Sixsmith and two unknown airmen.



The plot with Allied soldiers in Bispebjerg Cemetery.



Gravestone of D. R. Ross with the personal inscription "Not just today, but every day in silence we remember. Mom, Dad, John and sisters"



Gravestone of L. R. Smith with the personal inscription "Beloved son of R. E. and L.F. Smith. St. Annes-On-Sea. Task done. Flight Finished."





*The night fighter of Martin Drewes. Martin Drewes was one of Germany's 10 highest scoring flying aces. In 1997 he was living in Brazil.*

**Halifax II DT620 is the only Allied plane that crashed on or at Stevns, so these 7 airmen are the only known persons who perished during the battle for freedom in the area. On 11 April 1944 an American B-17 made a forced landing near Taastrup on Stevns and the crew of 10 airmen were smuggled to Sweden by the resistance movement. On 13 May 1944 a pilotless B-17 crashed into a corner of Store Heddinge Hospital and without anybody being hurt. The crew had baled out over Rügen.**



**AirmenDK [www.airmen.dk](http://www.airmen.dk) has more about the two planes.**

*Martin Drewes (right) says hello to a relative of one of the perished airmen of Halifax LW682 that Drewes shot down over Belgium in the spring of 1944. The event took place in 1997 during a reburial of the crew of the plane. Drewes had come to commemorate his earlier adversaries.*



**This memorial was erected by the Halifax Team sponsored by:  
Stevns Brands Fond,  
DiBa Bank,  
The brothers K. Hansen,  
The Danish Defence Brothers on Stevns,  
The Stevns Association of Mariners,  
The Parochial Council of Højerup,  
Home Guard District Køge Bay..**

**The inscription begins with  
In memory of  
7 Allied airmen  
who perished in 1943  
1000 metres from this stone.**