

From **Vestfynske mindesmærker vedrørende Besættelsestiden 1940-1945**
(Memorials on West Funen concerning the Occupation 1940-1945) by Viggo Hansen, Assens
to www.airmen.dk on 9 June 2009. Johannes V. Hansen had his 23rd anniversary at the air crash,
he told on 14 June 2009.

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT BY JOHANNES V. HANSEN, ØBJERGGÅRDEN, SØNDERBY BJERGE:

Remembrance of the air crash in Sønderby Bjerger in our field at Aa Strandvej near the farm "Strandlyst" on 25 April 1942.

The bomber was "Hampden P 5330" from the Royal Air Force.

The events as I recollect them

On 24 April I went to a dance in Assens, and I returned home rather late at night as it was my birthday and on that occasion I treated some friends with open sandwiches after the dance, so it was about half past two a.m. when I came home to my room.

On my way home from Assens by bike I heard overflights clearly. When British planes were on bombing raids to Hamburg or Kiel they passed right over our farm. We were told that they flew due east from their base in England, and over the Kattegat they turned south. It was always at night, and then there was a true display of fireworks from the flak which we could see clearly when Kiel was bombed. The planes came in waves, 4-5 at a time.

Well, I was about to go to bed that night when suddenly a plane from the south passed very very low over the farm, so that I hurried to turn the light off in my room, because the light beamed out of the window, as I had not drawn the blackout curtains. The plane turned around just on the other side of our farm, and once more it came over the building. At that moment they stopped the engines, so that I only heard the whistle in the air from the aircraft – and 4-5 seconds later the crash when it hit the ground. To me it sounded like a big stack of very dry brushwood being squashed.

Immediately I ran down into the living room and called the Falck (a private rescue service) on the telephone. I woke up my father (Valdemar Hansen), dressed quickly, woke up the farmhand – and then on my bike towards the beach. Halfway down the hill there was a bang at the burning plane. It struck me at once that it might be a bomb, so at full speed I headed into the ditch and covered my head. I stayed there for a minute or two, and as nothing more happened I dared to go down there. I made out that the fuel tank had exploded.

The reason for the disastrous landing (they were obviously going to land) was that Aa Strandvej was about one meter lower than the field to the north, where the plane hit the ground immediately before the road. The nose hit the road. Actually the plane made a somersault tearing down electric and telephone wires.

The crew knew that they had come in over land from the Lillebælt, so they had turned to ditch into the Lillebælt, and they had made the dinghies ready. Unfortunately they had come too far down. The plane had been hit by flak at the bombing of Kiel, so at a time they had problems, as the plane had caught fire.

We were told that they would have flown to Sweden, when they realized that they could not make it all the way back to England, but they had to land when they did it.

The plane had a crew of four, and it was a miracle that one of them was able to survive this crash. The survivor was the Canadian Frank Adams, and the 3 who had perished were J. H. Smith, a Canadian, J. Potter, an Englishman and J. M. Hicks, a Canadian.

Eventually I dared to go to Aa Strandvej. About 50 metres from the burning plane I suddenly heard moaning sounds from the field where the plane hit the ground before it jumped on to the road. It was dark, about three o'clock at night, but I went for the sound, and when I got there a man was sitting on the ground, moaning loudly with pain. By then our farmhand had arrived, so we got the airman to his feet and wanted to take him down to the road, but he was unable to walk, so we took him under his arms. I asked for his nationality at once and he said "Englishman".

Time and again when we dragged him along he would stop and tell us something unintelligible, but then we discovered that there were glows and a small burn near a pocket in his suit, so he wanted us to take it off him, as

he was very afraid that the fire might burst into flames again. It was hard to take his suit off, as we first had to remove his heavy boots with lambskin lining to get his trouser legs off. They were narrow at the bottom. He was moaning heavily, as he was very bruised and he had a broken leg. At that time the ambulance from Falck in Assens had arrived. We took him down to the road. In the light from the car we saw that all the skin of his forehead was a bleeding wound, and when we laid him on the stretcher he fainted.

He only survived because he got out of the plane, when it hit the ground in the field before the road, I think.

Frank Adams must definitely have been standing at the open door in the side of the plane, and as he stood in the doorway he simply fell out at the jolt, when it hit the ground, or he jumped out on the ground realizing the danger of staying in the plane.

He was taken to Assens Hospital, where he was a patient for about a month I think, with a German guard at his door so only doctors and nurses had access to him. However, one day the reverend Jeppesen from Kærum, who often visited the hospital to comfort patients, dressed himself in a doctor's white coat and visited Adams – and the German guard did not suspect anything.

Frank Adams was taken to a German internment camp, when he could be moved. He survived and returned to Canada.

The three dead men lay in our field. Two more ambulances had arrived, one of them from Glamsbjerg, and my father, who had also arrived by now, got some big lanterns from Falck for a search. I remember the charred bodies of the three deceased airmen. All of their clothes had burnt. One of them had his leg torn off at the middle of his thigh. I remember that the people from Falck were disgusted when having to put them on the stretchers.

At this time the fire at the plane had eased off. We saw various items from the crew's equipment lying in our field, pistols, boots, gloves, and many other things. By now also the police from Assens had arrived, and my father, our farmhand and I went through a short interrogation about our observations. The airman's suit which we had was examined by the police, and it took place at our neighbour's farm "Strandlyst" only about 50 m from the site of the accident. The Germans did not arrive until some time before noon.

German officers visited neighbours of the crash site in the next days to order each of us to give (paid) board and lodging for money to some German soldiers. It was a team specialized in dealing with crashed planes.