

## **Speech by Anders Straarup on 4 May 2025** right after the welcome by Gregers Laigaard:

We are happy to be gathered here and remember what happened in Denmark 80 years ago when the message of the liberation came on the radio on 4 May 1945, and think of what happened in Grønhøj.

I

On 25 September 1942 the Lancaster bomber R5679 came in from the east, burning, on the return trip from a mine laying operation south of Falster. It had been seen from radar station Rabe at Assentoft nær Randers, and a German night fighter managed to get up and shoot it ablaze.

On 29 July 2009 Gudrun Laigaard, 22 in 1942, the mother of Gregers, told Viborg Stifts Folkeblad about the event on 25 September 1942 at 01:22.

“I woke up because suddenly my bedroom got light. There was a very loud noise,” she states.

The bomber was attacked by a German night fighter and burst into flames near Grønhøj. In the house Gudrun Laigaard heard the noise from the engines of the big aircraft when it came roaring at low height over the village, burning. “It passed very close over the house. I nearly thought that it was going to crash here,” Gudrun told reporter Georg Ask Lunden Jensen in 2009, while they were sitting in the old inn looking out of the window to the western outskirts of Grønhøj where the plane fell to the ground.

During the crash one of the crew members, the rear gunner, had tried to bail out, but the plane was too low, so his parachute did not open up. On the following day his body was found by Marie and Edward Betzer. He had fallen into a hen run behind what today is 18 Mønstedvej, Grønhøj.

It was reported to the Police who informed the Germans. They arrived with a truck and a coffin. The German soldiers threw the dead airman and his parachute on the truck body and clapped their hands. On the same day Gudrun Laigaard saw that the Germans drove away with the pieces of wreckage.

II

In August 2012 a Danish colleague of David Geddes helped him to find out what happened in 1942. She found the article with Gudrun Laigaard on the internet, and then something happened. David Geddes wrote: “It was my uncle, Lewis Wilson Morrison, who was the pilot of the plane that crashed at Grønhøj.” Earlier I had had a connection with Mike Brewser, a relative of the rear gunner Mike Bevan.

Innkeeper Gregers Laigaard, editor Knud Gaarn-Larsen from Karup Weekly and I were involved. Based on information from readers two of my friends from Aarhus and I managed to find the exact crash site, now marked with a pole in the forest floor.

Exactly 70 years and 8 months after the crash the Lancaster Team managed to unveil this memorial stone and the memorial room with money collected in Denmark and from relatives of the deceased airmen. Here Gerhardt Hørdum had also joined the Lancaster Team. It was a great help that Gregers could use his many contacts so we had a number of goods and services for free. Otherwise the project would have been much more expensive. And now Gregers has had the memorial stone moved a bit, so it stands much better.

At the unveiling on 25 May 2013 there were 250 people present and 27 standards.

Since then David Geddes has been here twice, and this summer Karen and I will visit David and Cath in connection with a tour by bus to Scotland.

I wanted to use the song *En lærke letted'*, and I asked Edward Broadbridge if he knew it in an edition in English. After a couple of hours he returned. No, but now he made one – A lark ascended! He has also translated *Altid frejdig – Always dauntless* that ends this ceremony – and the complete works of N.F.S. Grundtvig! We'll find the song, and Karen will lead the singing.

### III

It is very fine to have official wreaths from organizations, authorities and military units, but it is also important that others feel a responsibility.

For many years there was a tradition on every Saturday at Svinø Churchyard on South Zealand that every farm brought floral greetings to some of the 108 plots. A fine tradition, but it ended many years ago. Instead there is a very big commemoration every year on 4 May on the evening of the German surrender.

In The Netherlands and in Belgium it has been a tradition for many years that each of about 42.000 fallen Americans with or without a known grave has a sponsor. Karen and I met a family that had just laid a floral tribute at their soldier's grave on the annual day of remembrance. As far as I know floral tributes are also laid at other celebrations. There is a waiting list for people who want to join this arrangement, I am told.

Very fine that a number of you have already laid a bunch of flowers. That you so much for that.

Many flowers in the 7 bunches of flowers were from private gardens.

And now we'll sing Always dauntless before Gregers ends this ceremony.