

From Hans Brandt, 11 years old at the time of the air crash, to [www.airmen.dk](http://www.airmen.dk) on 5th February 2009.

Then he lived in Skovbøl only 2 km south west of the crash site of LAN JB412 north of Varnæs.

### **The bomber**

One night in late January 1944 we had to seek shelter in the basement as so often both before and after. We were living in Skovbøl, a small village south of the Aabenraa Fjord so it was not far from the border to Germany. Therefore we often witnessed the drama when the searchlights from Flensburg cast their beams across the night sky trying to catch the English bombers. Flares from the planes and white "wads of cotton" from the exploding shells from anti aircraft guns lit up the sky in glimpses. It was a big show to us children. However, the distance was so great that the sound was missing. Only a few times we heard distant booms from the impact of bombs. But the planes often passed above us on their way to and from Flensburg and Kiel and other places where they were to lay their "eggs." We heard the distant hums from many engines getting closer, and soon the sirens sounded, so now we knew that it was time to go down into the basement. Our house was the only house in the village with a large basement with a strong ceiling supported by iron beams. Therefore it was declared a public shelter, and boxes with sand were placed in front of the basement windows.

Sometimes the aerial battles spread north to us, and bombers jettisoned their unpleasant loads to make it easier to escape from their pursuers. It was said that during a single night in August 1943 about 70 explosive bombs and hundreds of incendiary bombs fell in our parish. Fortunately no people were harmed, but some cows were killed in a field, and two or three farms were burnt down. As late as 1950 I found one of the hexagonal incendiary bombs from that time in a hedgerow. It was still intact and burst into flames when I banged it against a stone on the road.

When it came too close like this, neighbours with their children showed up. The smallest ones were laid to sleep in our cast-off baby beds. Mothers and we bigger kids sat on benches and old chairs, while the fathers went up to keep an eye on what was happening and now and then came down to report to us. Very much against their own a couple of them had spent four of the best years of their youth as German soldiers in trenches in France during World War I, so it would take more to scare them. That night the fathers came down and related that a burning bomber had appeared south east of the village. It was flying at a very low height towards north and would probably crash into the Little Belt or the Aabenraa Fjord very soon. Next day the word was spread very fast that the plane had crashed into a field close to a farm a little north of the adjacent village of Varnæs.

Half a year earlier I had started in a school in Aabenraa, and I had to go to school, but as soon as I was back home and we had had a little meal we jumped on our bicycles and raced over to see what had happened.

In this context "we" were my twin brothers, two years older than me, myself, and Christian, our friend of the same age, who was always present where things happened. The wreckage was scattered over a big area. The engines had fallen off one by one and were lying in a pool of oil, each in a crater of its own. We only found the three of them, but in our search for the fourth one we had to get through a hedgerow. A big round object of metal from the plane had made a hole through the hedgerow and was lying half buried into the ground. We jumped

down on it and went on into the field. Most of the fuselage was lying on a ridge in two parts. The tail was lying by itself some distance from the fuselage. It was filled with thin strips of tinfoil. We knew they were used to jam German radar. Obviously they had not managed to use them. There was no trace of the crew. Later we were told that the airmen had bailed out with their parachutes, but unfortunately from a height which was too low, so they had not survived. At that time we had no idea if the rumour was true.

In the fuselage there was a big mess: splintered glass, broken instruments and more or less melted metal parts mixed up. A handle in the cabin had a white celluloid sign saying "Bomb open." In a gun turret there were – apart from a destroyed machine gun – belts with machine gun cartridges and also a number of them loose. Surprisingly there were still no Germans present, so we filled our pockets with cartridges, melted parts of metal, and other interesting items.

In particular the cartridges proved to be useful. When you picked out the projectile, you got hold of some yellow gunpowder that opened undreamt-of possibilities to enterprising boys. Next day we really had something to tell our pals in the school in Aabenraa, and a number of them would like to join us to see the wreckage. Torben, a couple of years older than me, was very interested in aeroplanes and made me his guide. He collected souvenirs and he would definitely like to have the "Bomb open" sign. In the meantime a couple of German guards had come to the area. That of course made matters more complicated. The soldiers, who were a couple of elderly gentlemen, preferred to stay in the lee of the neighbouring farm, so it should be possible to steal up on the wreckage from the road, where the hedgerow gave good cover. Torben thought that I had better go to the wreckage. I was not very tall, while he was a tall lanky fellow, so equipped with his pocket knife I sneaked up on the wreckage about 50 metres into the ploughed field, apparently without being discovered. However, the guards must have heard something when I worked to cut off the sign, because suddenly they shouted something in German. I bent down and kept quiet, and then they shot. Today it is impossible for me to tell if there was one or two shots, but I raced across the field back to safety on the road, and one thing I remember very clearly: The roar of laughter when they saw a little boy make a new Danish record in sprint. They had certainly been bored and thought that it was funny to scare a boy in that way. They succeeded in doing so.

On second thoughts I realize that the soldiers of course just shot up into the air, but that was not the way I took it then.

In a way it was OK to scare the life out of me in that situation. On the other hand I have never quite forgiven their roars of laughter.

Once, maybe in the middle of the 1970's, I happened to see a TV item about the discovery of some 500 pound bombs found in a wet area between our village and the neighbouring village of Bovrup. Three bombs were found and defused or blown up. They had been dropped from an English Lancaster bomber before it crashed in January 1944.

Earlier a fourth bomb had been found in a hedgerow close to the wreckage and it had been disarmed a few days after the crash. There was no report if it had the imprints of four pairs of boys' shoes.