

 [Det er 80 år siden: Bombefly måtte nødlande, men Clay og hans mænd overlevede](#)

Artikel af Birthe Juul Mathiasen [BMA@jv.dk](mailto:BMA@jv.dk) i [JyskeVestkysten, Sønderborg](#) 24. maj 2024.

## **80 years ago: Bomber had to make a crash landing, but Clay and his men survived**

*Translation by ABS without photos – see the 9 photos in the edition in Danish and the captions here.*

**A number of planes crashed on Als during World War II. For the American Captain Clay it meant a happy ending and it gave his children close contacts to the area.**

24 May 2024, 18:00. By Birthe Juul Mathiasen in JyskeVestkysten

*Caption 1: During speeches and community singing a Chipmunk veteran plane suddenly made a flypast and circled over the area a couple of times. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

*Caption 2: Thank you so much that you let us be a part of what happened, Tom Clay, the son of Captain Clay, stated from the platform. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

Skærtøft: Karen Clay Codey still has her father's uniform. It was on display in the coffee tent when about 170 persons met on Friday afternoon at the site where Karen's father Robert Clay had to make a forced landing during World War II.

Karen, her sister Ann, and brother Tom Clay had come all the way from Utah in the U.S.A. to participate together with Mike Arnold, the son of Bombardier George Arnold from the plane.

80 years ago Stormy Weather made a forced landing at Skærtøft. The fathers are dead, but gratitude lives on in the next generation:

We are very honoured that people have erected memorials, not only to my father's plane, but to all planes that crashed on the island. My father survived, many others died, but to all descendants it means a lot that their effort is commemorated every year, Karen Clay Codey explains.

### **The wing hit there**

On 24 May 1944 Stormy Weather had been heading for Berlin, but it had been hit by anti aircraft shells over Germany and had turned around due to engine failures. Now the plane lost height and in the end flew only on one engine.

Pilot and Captain Robert Clay ordered all of the others to bail out.

Early in the afternoon 8 airmen fell down over Svenstrup and Klingbjerg while the Co-Pilot chose to remain in the plane to support his captain.

The others had to jump, as the rear end of the plane was about to break off, Karen Clay Codey explains.

The plane only just avoided hitting the chimneys in Holmskov and Østerskov. The pilot looked in vain for a suitable place for a forced landing, but there were trees and hills everywhere. At Skærtøft the flying height of the plane was so low that it was inevitable.

My father never talked about it, when we were kids, not until 2001 when we visited Als for the first time. Then he suddenly said: The wing hit right there. Imagine that he could recognize the road after so many years, his daughter recalls.

### **Came to a Prisoner of War Camp**

Town Councillor Bjørn Allerelli from the association Air Force Memorial Center Als, which works to gather

knowledge of the air crashes in order to open an information centre later, made a speech in which he mentioned a number of details of the violent crash landing.

Among other things he stated that the crew thought they had reached the southern part of Sweden when they came through heavy fog and spotted land.

*Caption 3. Mike Arnold is the son of Bombardier George Arnold from the plane, while Karen's, Ann's and Tom's father was Captain Robert Clay. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

On Als many people had seen and heard the plane, also the Germans who arrested all of the crew, which surrendered without fighting. That is why Karen Clay's father spent the rest of the war in a German Prisoner of War Camp. He also survived that.

My father was a big man, but he was all skin and bones when he came back. All of them were starving and my father had got a double vision, which lasted a full year, Karen Clay has been told.

Neither she nor the other siblings were born when Robert Clay was at war.

## Honorary members

Every year the Contact Committee for Military Traditions in the Sønderborg Area arranges memorial ceremonies at all the places on Als where Allied planes crashed. Often descendants of those who put their lives at risk participate, and this year at the memorial to Stormy Weather there were also 4 relatives of British airmen who perished in a crash at Broballe on the northern part of Als.

It is important for the relatives to see and hear what happened, states Leif Larsen from the Contact Committee.

But it is also important for the Contact Committee and Air Force Memorial Center Als which works to gather knowledge of the plane crashes in order to be able to open an information centre later.

It takes much effort to trace them, but by now we have contact to descendants from all air crashes on Als. It is important that we can honour those who fell, but also because descendants can contribute with new knowledge and objects from that time, Leif Larsen explains.

Therefore all known relatives have been made honorary members.

For us it means that we feel a special connection to the area. Through our father we have become a part of your history. Thank you so much that you let us be a part of what happened, Tom Clay said from the platform.

*Caption 4. Pilot and Captain Robert Clay's uniform which the family will donate to a future information centre on Als. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

*Caption 5. For Karen Clay it was the third time she visits Als and the memorial erected to Stormy Weather. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

*Caption 6. On the occasion of the day the white strips mark where the plane landed. The captain managed to climb out through a pane in the cockpit and then help out the Co-Pilot. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

*Caption 7. This is what it looked like till the Germans removed the wreckage. Photo borrowed from Air Force Memorial Center Als.*

*Caption 8. Some of the speeches were a bit long to some of the participants. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*

*Caption 9. Skul gammel venskab / Should old acquaintance be forgot was sung in both English and a dialect of Jutland. Photo: Birthe Juul Mathiasen.*