

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) Lancaster Salute to RAAF 460Sqn EE138

Lancaster EE138 Memorial
Restoration Group



www.ee138.net

May 5th 2011, on the edge of the small Danish village of Stadil lays a sacred site to 3 nations, that of Australia, Denmark and England. The quiet solitude of this place on this day would once again be stirred by the warlike roar of 4 Merlin engines belonging to a Lancaster bomber at low altitude. Unlike sixty eight years ago, the last minutes for the crew of EE138 which was being pursued by an unforgiving enemy, this Lancaster on this day was being followed by a grateful nation. The spine tingling fly past salute would be witnessed by over a thousand eager observers of all ages as well as media groups from all over Denmark.

This was a moment in history which would arouse very deep seated emotions in those who lived through the dark days of an occupied Denmark. For those so young that now within the local Stadil and Vedersø school class rooms they are taught of the demise and sacrifice of Lancaster EE138, which remains buried under a 30 metre long mound of soil within the small confines of a privately owned protected piece of sacred land, measuring 25 meters by 45 meters in the centre of a farmer's field. Less than 2km from their classroom, still lay 7 of the 8 crew who remain entombed within their Lancaster's fuselage. Perhaps the open and outward shedding of tears down the faces of both the very young and old was in itself a mourning for the crew of EE138 as the brutal looking bird flew low with a watchful eye over the last resting place of one of its own.



The day dawned with a clear blue sky, on all 4 roads leading into the small village of Stadil, groups of Danish flags were proudly raised. It would not be until 13:45 when official proceedings began within the confines at the crash site just a short distance from the village. About 250 people stood tightly packed together to listen to the speeches by the Ringkøbing Skjerne Kommune (council) representative Mr. Ole Kamp, who has been a long time advocate for the crew of EE138's protection.



Mrs. Jessie Bowler, formerly Thirkettle the then war time wife of Ernie Thirkettle mid upper on EE138, spoke about the friendships she has developed with many local Danish families since first visiting the site in 2008. She further expressed her heartfelt appreciation to those who have helped to maintain her former husband's final resting place.



RAAF Wing Commander Peter Miller, then read a letter to the people of Stadil on behalf of Wing Commander Robert Elliot the commanding officer of RAAF 460 Squadron. This was in it self an historic occasion as it was the first contact between the squadron and the people of Stadil since the loss of EE138 on the 4th of September 1943. The letter was then read in Danish to a very appreciative group of gathered Danes by Mr. Erik Poulsen; who was representing the local Stadil parish and also a co-organiser of the day's on ground events. This letter was handed to Mrs. Grete Møllerhøj representing the Stadil archives, to which the letter will form an important element of the many record documents held by the archives concerning the loss of Lancaster EE138.



The RAF was represented by Group Captain Mike Barley who spoke about the make up of the mixed crew of EE138, which was represented by the brightest that each nation could offer at the time. He pondered the notion, could the crew of EE138 have ever possibly imagined that they would bring 3 nations together over so many ensuring years and possibly imagine the significance of the day's events as they were about to unfold?



Wreathes were then laid, firstly by RAAF Peter Miller, RAF Mike Barley, The Danish Home Guard, Mrs Jessie Bowler who was assisted by RAF Mike Barley.

Then 8 small white wooden crosses (which were constructed in Adelaide by crew relative Forrester and carried to Denmark), each cross with an enduring poppy and nations flag representing each of the crew were placed by;

Mrs Kamma Poulsen - who has for many years maintained the EE138 crash site.

Mr. Erik Poulsen – who was a member of the on ground organising group and Stadil parish representative.

Mr.Ole Kamp - member of the onground organising group and representing the Ringkøbing Skjerne Kommune.

Mrs Jill Bryant - member of the on ground organising group

Mrs Grete Møllerhøj - representing the Stadil archives and the local coordinator of the on ground organising group

Mr. Egon Jepsen – the land owner of the ee138 crash site

Ms. Joanna Lewis and Mr. Peter Forrester crew relatives of Sid Forrester and BBMF Danish Bid applicants

The Ode was read by RAAF Peter Miller.

This was followed by two songs being sung, lead by the Local Stadil Ladies choir; En Laerk Letted and Auld Lang Syne.

It was reported that approximately 1000 people lined the small farm track and the roads leading to the crash site. Cars parked for kilometre after kilometre with people anxious to witness this historic event which was about to unfold, the scheduled 3 low level fly pasts by the BBMF Lancaster were due to commence at 14:30.

BBMF Lancaster PA474 is one of only two Lancaster's remaining in airworthy condition out of the 7377 that were built – the other being in Canada. It is now timely to make mention that Lancaster PA474 carries the nose art of Lancaster EE139 “ Phantom of the Ruhr” a Lancaster (just one production number on from EE138)which served part of its time with 100 squadron at Grimsby the satellite station to Binbrook, the home of 460 Squadron.

Perhaps the persistent westerly breeze from the North Sea Jutland coast which lays just approximately 5kms away to the west was partly responsible for the 10 -13 minute late arrival of the Lancaster, but that small wait was not even a measure on the disappointment felt by the writer, and most if not all of Jutland Denmark, when in 2010 the BBMF Lancaster Danish flypast was cancelled on the morning of the 5th due to a fuel cock problem. A story for another day.

But continuing, some of the crowd took this opportunity to reposition themselves for a photographic opportunity of the Lancaster as it flew over the crash site which is not only distinct in the land form but that of the Granite memorial Stone which was unveiled on the 5th of May 1950 and the bronze plaques. These plaques, which now describe the historically correct series of events concerning the demise of EE138, were unveiled on the 4th of September 2008 by the then Australian Ambassador to Denmark Ms. Sharyn Minahan on the 65th commemoration of the loss of EE138.



The crowd stood peering at the Southern horizon, the direction from which the BBMF Lancaster was to approach the fly past site. South South East is also the same direction that an eye witness claimed that EE138 and the Junkers night fighter also approached from at approximately 2:20AM on the morning of the 4th of September 1943.

As a degree of concern over the late appearance of the Lancaster entered the thoughts of the writer, all small movements on the southern horizon raised the hopes and then fluttered away as that of the many water birds that inhabit the area of what was once the West Stadil Fjord in 1943.



Then the exclamation – There !! A thin dark line on the horizon appeared and the wings did not flap about and the motion remained steady, concerted and directed. I remember a massive sigh of relief as the most distinct silhouette of this bird just trundled it's way ever closer, soon it could be seen above the end of the distant line of cars parked along the adjoining road in that direction.



The shape was distinct as was the sound of the 4 Merlin engines that could now be heard, the height of approach was meant to be 500 feet, as the Lancaster roared directly overhead. The altitude of the Lancaster measured above some of the 11 flag poles with Danish flags proudly displayed would have only been 4 -5 flagpoles high !

The crowd as one stood stunned, as the Lanc banked to port and made a turn within the fence line of the field, to once again charge the site but this time from the West. It was now that I noticed people cheering and waving at the very visible crew within the cockpit. As the Lanc skimmed over the site for the second time and began to bank to starboard, the full view of the camouflaged upper side of the aircraft became clearly visible.



It was later learned that the Captain pilot and members of the crew had decided amongst themselves on seeing the large crowd on the approach to the site to add an extra pass. They also extended the turns of the aircraft so as to pass over those very appreciative folks parked along the adjoining roads. Once again the Lanc roared overhead and turned to the East taking in the village of Stadil and all those positioned with picnic baskets along the road in that direction, a continued turn made up the very low final salute to the now very vocal crowd. This the final salute to the crew of EE138 and the BBMF Lanc headed North towards the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery at Lemvig, were another group awaited its arrival. I encourage readers of this story to visit the www.ee138.net website to view Danish Television links to view videos of this flypast.

In April 2009 I learned that the BBMF Lancaster was to undertake a series of fly pasts over various sites across Holland on the 4th and 5th of May. I contacted RAAF Wing Commander John Ibbotson in London to see if he could provide any further info, as it turned out, John was meeting with the then CO of the BBMF a few days later. No amount of persuading would see the late inclusion of a flypast over the EE138 Stadil site in Denmark. Instead we tried to have the crash site of 460 Squadron Lancaster EE132 included in the Holland program but again unfortunately this was not possible either. It was explained that every minute of the BBMF Lancaster's air time is precious and heavily calculated and any flight plan deviations or extensions are generally not possible - given that the BBMF Lancaster has an allowance of only 100 flying hours per year. This would become a significant piece of information given that the eventual 2011 Holland / Danish fly past programme would utilise 10 of these hours.

So our BBMF bid application while originally conceived in April 2009 was officially submitted to the BBMF events team in September 2009, that bid also included a request for an element to be added to the Holland flypast on the 4th of May 2010. This included the Lopik farm house crash site, that of the crew of 460 Squadron Lancaster EE132. As the BBMF Lancaster never managed to make it across the English Channel last year, we then provided support to Robert Spence in compiling his 2011 Holland EE132 BBMF bid.

The Danish 2011 bid, which was submitted soon after last years failed attempt by the BBMF Lancaster to make it out of the UK. The bid took in a total of 24 fly past sites over Denmark on the 5th of May and a further 6 Danish sites were included on the return trip to the UK on the 6th of May. Our Danish bid also included proposing a public viewing of the BBMF Lancaster at its stop over at Billund Airport. This was agreed to by the BBMF and took place on the morning of May 6th notwithstanding, it being a working day once again a large crowd turned out to get up close to the Lancaster. Joanna (Jo) and I after driving some 2 hours from Stadil

that morning arrived at the Cimber Stirling maintenance hangar at 07:45am, well before the public were scheduled to arrive. After being issued with our air side credentials it was not long before the BBMF crew arrived with Mr. Søren Flensted.

We introduced ourselves to the crew, who said “so you’re the two Aussies whose names appear on all that paper work. What a long trip you have made!”

The Lancaster was tantalisingly out of sight being readied for refuelling as the public and media started to gather. A short time later the BBMF flight engineer Brendon O’Sullivan and co pilot Tim Dunlop arrived back in a small van, they approached Jo and myself and asked if we would accompany them back to the Lancaster as the Captain - Pilot had invited us to view the Lanc.

A short drive across the apron and there before us was the Lancaster, as we approached the Lancaster, Captain Ernie Taylor, greeted us with a smile and a warm welcome, followed by “well up you go”. It was the most amazing privilege to be invited inside the BBMF Lancaster to have a look around.



With the refuelling completed the pull tractor started to tow the Lanc back to the public viewing area. While we were on the 15 minute slow journey back inside the Lanc we were just staggered and amazed at how the internals of the Lanc, which has to be one of Britains national treasures, is so perfectly restored and maintained. It appears in the same state as that of a WW2 Lanc, every piece of equipment from control box’s, switches, dials, parachutes, radio, radar and levers are original. I took this opportunity to confirm the origin of a small lever I had been given by a Danish man in 2010, which he had found some 15 years earlier at the EE138 Stadil crash site. It was indeed the lever which operates the pilot’s harness release and which is located on the arm rest of the pilot’s seat – a special gift to our family confirmed by way of a special invite for which I am so privileged and grateful.



With the Lancaster now positioned outside in the bright sunshine on the forecourt of the Cimber Sterling hangar the security personnel allowed the waiting crowd to move up to the Lancaster. This was because the BBMF crew wanted to repay those gathered with an up close and touch of the outside of the Lancaster, something extremely rare. The crew moved amongst the crowd of Danes as they went about their pre flight checks on engines, recharging the brake systems and all manner of inspections. People were so appreciative as the crew answered questions and posed for photos. There was a lovely feeling of goodwill, a number of people stood in a line up to climb the rear ladder and take a look into the fuselage and take photos from the top wrung. Incredibly the BBMF crew ensured that before they left all those individuals wanting to do this were afforded the opportunity over the extended 2 hour public viewing. The captain, Ernie Taylor, had one last surprise for us all as he had spent 30 minutes negotiating with the Billund Airport and civil authorities to add one extra low level fly past of the crowd gathered in front of the Cimber hangar as the Lancaster departed – Well done !!

Mr. Søren Flensted is our Danish friend who assisted in compiling the original Danish flight path for our 2010 BBMF bid and who we invited to be the Master of Ceremonies at the 2008 65th commemoration and plaque

unveiling at the Stadil crash site. The 2008 event was conceived in 2006/7 after a visit to the Stadil EE138 crash site in 2004 by Jo and I. Already since our return from Denmark we have been contacted by many Danes with words of appreciation and encouragement for what we have achieved thus far, as well being told stories of family members who saw and had heard the air battle that night in September 1943.

One of those people who contacted us was a gentleman by the name of Anders, whose father ran the Stadil grocery store in 1943. Anders had explained that he is in possession of a propeller blade from my uncle's Lancaster EE138 - which was recovered from the site a few years after the crash on September 4th 1943. You can imagine my surprise upon hearing of this news and now having been sent a photograph of it and hearing the series of events that saw the blade finally end up with Anders.



In a short period of time it has been agreed that the blade will be appropriately mounted and then eventually taken back to the crash site for all to see and appreciate. It is still very early days but the date of September 4th 2013 is being considered as an appropriate date to unveil the blade on the 70th commemoration of the loss of EE138. Yet another event to be planned and organised, which from our experience is extremely satisfying but not to be undertaken lightly as organising a commemoration in an overseas country far from Australia is neither a short nor simple task.

Such events may touch upon the difficult logistics of supply and transport, of involving local dignitaries, seeking approvals from landowners, uncovering age-old disagreements in far off places, language translations, promises abandoned, manufacturing infrastructure, contacting civilian and service officials and speakers, and of course, arranging finances. Not to mention fine details such as flags, wreaths, producing and printing programs, sound systems, marquees, chairs, commemorative gifts, parking and providing coffee and biscuits!

Committees are well known for producing "unusual" results and uneven application of effort. The outcome is usually one or two people shouldering the tasks and, with luck, not coming up with a "camel". However, there are far greater benefits. Establishing many new friendships, receiving wonderful cooperation from strangers who volunteer help from seemingly nowhere, discovering history previously unsuspected, discounting false history, and most importantly, realising that the sacrifices of Australian service personnel have not been in vain and are still greatly appreciated and remembered by our overseas allies.

The EE138 Memorial Restoration Group, based in South Australia, has had a busy time of it over the last three or four years organising the replacement of part of a memorial to RAAF 460 Squadron Lancaster EE138, and making application for the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster to overfly the Danish crash site, along with others in Denmark and Holland.

These events have been accompanied by commemoration services at the site(s). Some of the results of that work can be seen at www.ee138.net

2008 marked the 65th anniversary of the loss of Lancaster EE138 and all its eight crew, in the early morning of September 4, 1943, following an aerial battle with a Junkers 88 over Stadil, Mid-West Jutland while returning from a trip to Berlin.

A rather tatty and inaccurate information stand had been erected in 1993, next to the granite Mindesten (memorial stone) of 1950 which bears the names of the four Australian and four English crew members, seven of who still lie buried within their bomber.

With few siblings and wives still alive, contact between crew relatives from the late 40's had almost been forgotten. The painful letters between families grieving their lost sons, brothers, or husbands had also slipped into history, just as the requests for garden bulbs from home to be planted at the site were now mere records. In 1950, Ian Forrester, youngest brother to Flying Officer Sidney Forrester, and then 22 years old, stayed at the farm overlooking the paddock where the Lancaster had disappeared below the marshy edge of what was once the Vest Stadil Fjord. Friendships and contacts made at the time would continue with letters to and fro with my Grandmother Nel and various Danes up until her passing in 1980 and that of my father Ian in 1982.

In 1981, members of the Carthew family related to Warrant Officer Ewin Carthew, Navigator, visited on the anniversary of the event.

Chance always plays a part in events, in the air or on the ground. Peter Forrester, nephew of F/O Sid. and son of Ian, visited in 2004 and noted the stand's poor condition.

In 2005, and as described by Donald Stewart, a cousin to W/O Ewin Carthew navigator on EE138. Having examined the site, and having been relieved of his Driver's License by a pick-pocket in Paris two days previous, was walking along the road like a latter day Percy Grainger, when he encountered "yon solitary Highland lass". He did not gently pass, but did stop, and there, by the low flat fields near West Stadil Fjord, began a renewal of history and eventual contact some weeks later with a person called Peter Forrester, the rest is history and is still being written.

Sidney Forrester and Ewin Carthew went to Unley High School in South Australia together and played in the same cricket team. It is particularly interesting and worth reading some of the letters home from these crew members by way of the crew section on the www.ee138.net website.

After a research trip to the National Archives in Canberra during May of 2005 where valuable information was gathered and finally, amongst which, the squadron code of EE138 was at last discovered as being E-2 Easy. Also the reuniting of EE138 crew relatives had started and the core members of the Lancaster EE138 Memorial Restoration Group was formed. Later in 2005 and early 2006 we came across the relatives of RAAF Squadron Leader Carl Kelaher this was closely followed by contact with relatives of RAAF Bomb Aimer Cyril Walsh. Later in 2006, the then war time wife of RAF Mid Upper Ernie Thirkettle made contact with relatives of Carthew through a South East Families History group. In Late 2008 the niece of RAF Engineer Bert Jowett made contact with us through our then recently established website. Then finally after exhaustive searching, in June of 2009 the daughter of RAF Tail Gunner Arthur Rolfe was found. We have only managed to find a distant family friend of RAF Wireless Operator John Coombes.

However in November 2009 the nephew of Ernie Thirkettle made contact with us, once again via the www.ee138.net website, this was a nephew that was quickly reunited with an Aunt that he never knew existed and a nephew that she had not known of.



March 2006 - a gathering of EE138 family and friends at Rendelsham South Australia during a visit to Australia by Vic and Pam Kelaher. Also attended by members of the Carthew, Forrester and Walsh families.

Well that is the story of our experience with the BBMF Lancaster fly past over the crash site of 460 Squadron Lancaster EE138 AR-E2 Easy. – We will remember them.

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