

The Fliers Stood in the Living Room

Kamma Halkjær has lived with the story of the fliers all her life.

By Dorte Sig Leergaard

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Stadil: Kamma Halkjær Poulsen for many years has seen to that the grave for the killed fliers on the field in Stadil always was kept nice and tidy.

For this effort she was greatly praised and had many, many thanks from the foreign guests who Thursday spoke at the Commemoration in Stadil.

The Halkjær family was invited to the commemoration, and they were met with warm gratitude for their effort for the site and their great hospitality to the many family members of the deceased who during the years have come to Stadil – and been invited in with one of the Halkjærs.

Kamma Halkjær's family lived on the farm Fuglsang when the Lancaster was shot down. Kamma's father Ingemann Halkjær saw it, and in 1950 he arranged for a tombstone be raised for the dead fliers.

For some time the municipality took care of the grave, but when local road men were brought to an end, Kamma Halkjær Poulsen took over.

"I just could not have it that it was not looked after. And I also did it for the sake of my father," Kamma Halkjær Poulsen says.

What now if

The crash – and the fight against Nazism had a great impact on the Halkjær home, Kamma Halkjær Poulsen remembers being just a small girl during the War. But she could sense from the parents what was going on.

"It filled a lot. There has been an incredible lot of talk about what if we had not had any help from the Allies. How would it have been to live in Denmark," Kamma Poulsen says.

Even though the numbers of children in the Halkjær home rose to ten, among the photos of children there were room for photos of the fliers.

"We had pictures of five of them. And they were placed in the nice living room!" Kamma Halkjær Poulsen says.



INVITED Of course Kamma Halkjær Poulsen could be seen in the wind among the many people who joined to remember and honour the fliers.



SYMBOL Many of the wreaths were made of poppies which have become a symbol of fallen allied soldiers. The symbol started when poppies bloomed on the battle fields of Flanders where hundred of thousands of soldiers fell during World War 1.

Freedom, Courage, and Will to Sacrifice

Words that are not used at random were spoken when **eight fliers yesterday were remembered** at a beautiful commemoration on a blowy field at Stadil.

By Dorte Sig Leergaard
and Lars Kryger

Stadil: If it is true that a flag is at its best in headwind, it could be no better than yesterday in Stadil when “Dannebrog” was allowed to stretch out in the wind along with the flags of the Allies from England and Australia. 130 people had come to remember and honour the eight Australian and English fliers who were shot down over Stadil on the night of the 4th of September 1943 and are buried on the field at Stadiløvej.

Present were about 25 relatives of the killed men from Australia and England, representatives from the Royal Air Force, and the Royal Australian Air Force, as well as the Australian ambassador to Denmark.

And the wind freshened up over the assembly like did it bring the song of history and for a moment blew all evasiveness away. Somebody had given their lives for righteousness and freedom.

Still fight for freedom

The ceremony by the grave for the eight fliers was initiated with “Der er et yndigt land” (the Danish anthem) beautifully sung by the Ladies’ Choir of Stadil, after which Ole Kamp on behalf of Ringkøbing-Skjern municipality welcomed the guests and told that the municipality gladly had helped preparing the commemoration.

“We have taken the task in the great thankfulness to the Australian and English men who sacrificed their lives in the fight to make Europe free again, a fight which never stops. Also on this day there are people fighting for freedom – some of them at the risk of their lives”, Ole Kamp said.



CEREMONY: Both local and foreign guests had come to Stadil yesterday



Peter Forrester is nephew of Sidney Forrester who perished in the Lancaster

Wing Commander John Ibbotson from the Australian Air Force spoke for many when he started out saying that events like the one in Stadil always give him a lump in the throat because they are young people sacrificing their lives so unselfishly.

“The eight fliers came from Squadron 460 and having distinguished themselves during the education, they were sent directly into operational service. 1943 was a rough year. And no squadrons made so big sacrifices as 460. 1000 men were killed which means that the squadron was extinguished five times. But no one else had thrown so many bombs as squadron 460”, John Ibbotson said, who was of course wearing full uniform.

Wing Commander Dick Macormac from the Royal Air Force picked up the thread:

“It is easy to get it at a distance. It is easy to look at history in an odd perspective. But “the Boys” on board did not know that the Germans were loosing. They fought for freedom. With their own lives at stake. They took off again and again. And they kept on. Boys who sat in a noisy machine, a terrifying environment, on an inconceivably dangerous mission. It is no different from the 16 young men Denmark has lost in Afghanistan or the three Canadians who were killed there yesterday. Freedom continues to have its price. Because of this I am proud to be here to-day.”

Peter Forrester who is the nephew of the pilot Sidney Forrester gave the compliments from Australia from one of Sidney’s flying mates, now 94 years old Clarence Gardner, who told how fate and luck had made him survive many bombing missions while the friend Sidney was killed on his first.



The Australian ambassador Sharyn Minahan unveiled the memorial plaque and laid down a wreath.

Moving

After anthems and prayer by Chaplain Jørgen Eilschou Holm Ambassador Sharyn Minahan unveiled the new memorial plaques made of bronze which tell about the crew. When this happened about ten men in the assembly straightened themselves – that is, the apprentices from Vestas Machining in Lem who have produced the pedestal for the plaques. Solid stuff in which was put many hours and much honour.

In spite of the persisting wind over the ceremony the assembly was taken by a certain silence when the laying down of wreaths started.

Quietly and dignified the relatives went to the grave and laid down their wreaths made of red poppies supplied with a small greeting, a photo, and a word for remembrance. Like the greeting of the Walsh family to their Cyril Augustine, the school teacher, who enlisted and died in Stadil:

“No more war, war never again”.



Victor Kelaher (with white beret) cousin of Squadron Leader C.R. Kelaher attended the Commemoration too



BACK. For the second time Margaret Downing visits her brother's final resting place

The Finest Young Man

By Dorte Sig Leergaard

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STADIL: Sidney Forrester was 22 years old when he lost his life together with seven mates some night over Stadil. Yesterday his younger sister Margaret Downing took her final leave with her cheerful brother.

“He really was a nice man. He loved fun, was good at what he did, and everybody liked him,” Margaret Downing tells.

She still remembers how she and her brother

spent a lot of time together. Sidney was the eldest of five brothers and sisters.

The family lived in the country in the South of Australia, but when Sidney had finished the 9th grade, the head of the family decided that the family should move to Adelaide in order that Sidney could have proper education.

At Unley High School he graduated with distinction.

“But when the War broke out, he enlisted,” Margaret Downing tells and she was not surprised by his decision.

She no longer remembers the day when he left. But she remembers when the postman brought the telegram with the message “Sidney Forrester is missing.”

Six month after this first telegram another one came: “Sidney M. Forrester is missing, presumed dead”.

It was still hard to believe. “But as time passed by, we had to accept,” Margaret Downing says.

This is the second time she is in Denmark to visit the site at Stadil, but she was happy with the Commemoration yesterday. Now the chapter about her brother has been finished.

“It was very moving and very impressive,” Margaret Downing says.

He knows what it is like

By Dorte Sig Leergaard

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STADIL: Wing Commander Dick Macormac from RAF surprised everybody when he started his speech in flawless Danish.

Among other things he talked about courage and will of sacrifice. He placed himself fully alongside the young men who died that night 65 years ago – and those who now loose their lives in Afghanistan.

And it was not just words from RAF's representative at yesterday's commemoration.

Dick Macormac is a pilot himself. Flew over Iraq during the first Golf War and has lost mates of his.

“Yes, I can certainly relate to what happened here. It is not only a question about being present”, Dick Macormac says.

And the Wing Commander tells about the mate who flew the Tornado. Macormac flew during the night, the mate during the day. They passed each other by morning and night.

“One morning he stood there with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. I saw him never since,” Macormac says. The mate was shot down somewhere over Iraq.



ENGLISHMAN IN DANISH. The Danish language and his Danish wife Dick MacCormac brought along after three years of exchange as a F16-pilot at Flyvestation Skrydstrup during the 90's

Mission Accomplished

Jessie Bowler gets to everybody's hearts when she lies down a **wreath of red roses and a wedding photo** at the grave of her husband Ernest in Stadil.

By Lars Kryger
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Stadil: You can see it at once...

It is the woman from the wedding photo from 1942. Jessie Bowler, now 85 years old, still has the mild face with the warm smile as the 19-year old Jessie who married Ernest Thirkettle in 1942 and was widowed one year after when he lost his life as a top shooter on Lancaster EE138 on the way back to England.

On the 65-year day Jessie Bowler is in Stadil where she takes everybody by the heart when she quietly and very dignified, leaning to a soldier, goes to Ernest's grave and lies down a wreath of red roses. In the middle of the wreath the black and white wedding photo of a happy Ernest and Jessie is placed...

"I think that the ceremony in Stadil has been beautiful. It has not been sad because everyone thought of the wonderful boys and why they died. I shall not cry until tomorrow," Jessie tells.

"If Ernest was afraid? He never said that he was afraid, but he must have been. It was very unpleasant conditions onboard a Lancaster. But he was proud. Proud to be part of a crew appointed to become pathfinders (pathfinders who fly ahead to point out the target, editor). All young men want to fly. So would Ernest. No way I could stop him. The fleet and the navy was nothing to him. He wanted to fly."

In 1943 Ernest is reported missing, and Jessie finds herself in the same situation as thousands of women during war time. Life must go on, and the job as a clerk at Home Security in Whitehall - the British administration of state - becomes Jessie's base.

In 1946 she gives up the hope of getting Ernest back home alive. The War ended a year ago, and if Ernest had been taken prisoner of war, he would have been at home. 1947 she finally gets the message about his fate as fallen.

The Lancaster machine is identified thanks to two note books which are found at the crash site, and which the British authorities are handed over.

Jessie still is active working on collecting the last information about EE138. For instance she helps locating relatives to the three other Englishmen onboard - Rolfe, Coombes, and Jowett.

"The best memory I shall bring back home from Stadil is the look of the many flowers on the grave, and the picture of the crew on the new bronze plaque. This is quite fantastic. And the family who kept the grave so beautiful through all the years has been wonderful," Jessie Bowler says.

On Friday night she is flying home to London.

Mission accomplished.



Jessie Bowler only was married one year to Ernest.