

**Navigator RAAF Flying Officer Stoney Mitchell evaded  
with the assistance of many Danish civilians and Resistance members**

**70th anniversary of the shooting down of RAF Lancaster ME449**

**Speech by Gail Michener  
representative of the Stoney Mitchell family**

**Bechs Hotel, Tarm, Denmark  
12 March 2015**

My name is Gail Michener and I am the daughter of Navigator Stoney Mitchell. Sue Westcott, who is the daughter of the Bomb Aimer Mervyn Bertie, has just told you the story of her father and my father and the various Danish people involved.

Let's think about what happens when a bomber is shot and the pilot, like Stan Slater, orders the crew to abandon. First, the hatch is removed from the floor of the plane and dropped; it landed on Laurids Bundgaard's farm and is now on display in the Ringkøbing Museum. Then the airmen jump out one at a time and they land in different places. By lucky chance, Merv Bertie and Stoney Mitchell found each other the very first night and they slept together under the protection of some pine trees in a plantation – we do not know exactly where.

We have heard Dorthe Madsen's wonderful story about finding the men walking along the road toward Tarm, potentially into danger because of Germans stationed there, and how she guided them to her parents' house.



**Gail Michener**  
daughter of Stoney Mitchell  
*Photo by Birthe Holme Kasch*

The next two days are still a mystery. I have been to Denmark six times trying to follow the route. I know Merv Bertie and Stoney Mitchell walked for two days from the Kristensens' farm south of Tarm until they got to Funder; that's a distance of about 70 km in a straight line, but I am sure they walked much farther than that. We know from the records written by Stoney and Merv that they were helped, as Sue mentioned, by many people. I would still like to find the people who fed them and protected them. So, keep the story circulating because there is a chance that someone knows.

Amazingly today, I learned more of the story of Ken Foster, the Flight Engineer. Unfortunately none of the members of the Foster family were able to attend. We have someone here with us

today, Hans Uhre, who still has Foster's identity card and what we call the "dog tags" that he wore around his neck. So, here is a piece of Foster's history still living in the Tarm area. People are keeping these mementoes, and I hope they will be passed on so that the next generation will understand what happened.

Sue has covered the huge list of Danish people who assisted her father and my father -- a combination of Danish civilians who bravely risked their own lives to be helpful and those who were in the Resistance and risked their lives in many different ways. For example, very brave Danes went out at night to collect the canisters dropped by the SOE and to distribute the ammunition and guns to Resistance members so they were armed in case the war came onto Danish ground. I am told there are still hidden guns in Denmark to this day. There are wonderful stories about what happened with some of those canisters, and I recommend you talk to people in the Birk family about their experiences.

As Sue Westcott has told you, Merv and Stoney went from Funder to Ikast and to Herning. Then Toldstrup, the famous Toldstrup, drove them to Ebeltoft and they subsequently got to the coast and safely home.

In addition to the people who helped in 1945, I need to thank all of you. I look around this room and at every table there are friends and all of you have helped me some way or another. You have invited me into your home, you have helped me with archives and writing newspaper articles. Every one of you here is also a Danish helper, not just those from 1945. You keep the story alive, you protect the grave, you help me. Thank you very much for all of those things.

Several years ago Sue Westcott, the daughter of Merv Bertie, suggested we put plaques on the safe houses where Merv and Stoney were hidden. I proposed that if Sue organized plaques for the safe houses, I would arrange to put a plaque at the grave site. Then I realized that not only would the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary be in 2015 but, as time passes, more and more people from 1945 are no longer with us -- some have died just in the past year or so, Ole Engberg, Knud Raunkjær, Stan Slater. I saw an opportunity to not only install a plaque at the grave, but to have a gathering of people connected to the events of 1945, including the families of the two gunners who died, and I am so thrilled that the Morris and Porter families are here.

None of this day's events would have been possible without much support, including from Sue Westcott herself. Last year I suggested this event to Kirsten Kolby of the Tarm Parish Council, and to anything I mentioned Kirsten said "Yes, we can do that." Many thanks to Kirsten for her role and for acting as MC at the grave-side ceremony.

Another person on the organizing committee is Søren Flensted, who unveiled the plaque today and has helped me in many ways. I highly recommend that you look at Søren's web site<sup>1</sup> which, because it has a photograph of my father, was responsible for getting me started in 2011 on my search and ultimately for all of us being here today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Airwar over Denmark* [www.flensted.eu.com/1945026.shtml](http://www.flensted.eu.com/1945026.shtml)

Magnus Kolby very kindly agreed to be Toastmaster, so thanks to him.

You have heard from Sue how Per Bonde has been so important for us. Per can arrange anything, tents, flags, everything. His help has been critical throughout.

I also need to thank my husband Dan Michener who has come with me on all six trips to Denmark and has helped me in searching archival records.

Anni Guldberg Madsen, daughter of Børge Rasmussen who was the English school teacher in Tarm, has helped me every step of the way with translation of Danish archival sources.

I would love to have the time to thank every individual here, but take it from me that I thank you all. I thank the people of Tarm for maintaining the grave so wonderfully, I thank all of you who helped, I thank you for coming today.



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