

Bomb Aimer RAAF Pilot Officer Mervyn Bertie evaded capture with the assistance of many Danish civilians and Resistance members

70th anniversary of the shooting down of RAF Lancaster ME449

Speech by Sue Westcott
representative of the Mervyn Bertie family

Bechs Hotel, Tarm, Denmark
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Greetings

My name is Sue Westcott and my father Mervyn Bertie was the Bomb Aimer on Lancaster Bomber ME449. After the plane crashed my father found Stoney Mitchell, the Navigator, and they were given shelter and assistance by a number of Danish people for 24 days. My father subsequently made two trips to Denmark after World War 2 - the first in 1952 and then again in 1980 with my mother, Eileen.

Each time he stayed in Ikast with Naomi and Arnold Petersen, both of whom were members of the Ikast Danish Resistance Group. On both occasions Mervyn tried to find the other Resistance members who had helped him but was unsuccessful. However, in 1980 he and my mother visited the grave site here in Tarm.

One of the Danish people my father wanted to thank was Dorthe Madsen - then Dorthe Kristensen - and also her parents Peder and Maria. Dorthe had found Mervyn and Stoney walking along the road on the 13th March and invited them to come to her parents' house. My father remembered their bravery all his life and really wanted to thank them. Sadly the letter from Denmark in 1989 to say that Dorthe had been found was too late as Mervyn had died 18 months beforehand in 1987.

So today I would like to speak on behalf of my father - 70 years after the crash - and thank all those wonderful Danish people who helped him and kept him safe here in Denmark. Thank you to the farmers and their wives who gave him food and shelter, the man on his bicycle who stopped and gave his lunch. Thanks also to Ottine and Aage Fisker who allowed Mervyn and Stoney to shelter in their barn and to Mailor Ambrosiussen and Nørby Christensen who went to question the men at the Fisker farm.



Sue Westcott
daughter of Mervyn Bertie
Photo by Birthe Holme Kasch

Now to the Resistance members who were so important to Stoney and Mervyn and should also be thanked:

Gunnar Birk and Sigurd Birk who assisted and accompanied the men on their journeys between the safe houses.

The late Ole Engberg who drove the men to Ikast and then to Herning. Fortunately I was able to meet Ole Engberg in 2012 and thank him - what a lovely person he was.

Jens Toldstrup who drove the men from Herning to Ebeltoft.

Naomi and Arnold Petersen who hid the men at their home in Ikast for 5 days and remained close friends of my father after the war.

Magdalene and Alfred Balle Pedersen who hid the men at Herning for 12 days.

Svend Aage and Gudrun Ballisager who hid the men for 3 days at Ebeltoft.

And lastly the crew of the fishing boat "Freden" who took Mervyn and Stoney to Sweden.

Today is a day I will always remember as it brings together so many people. It is wonderful to meet the families of the other crew members and share this day with them.

In particular I would like to thank two other important people. Firstly Gail Michener, Stoney Mitchell's daughter, who has done such amazing research into the crash and given so much of her time over the last four years. Because of Gail I have been able to meet so many people, especially Dorthe Madsen and the late Ole Engberg, and have also visited the crash site and the safe houses in Ikast and Herning and Dorthe's family house in Tarm.

Thank you to the current owners of these houses, Kaj Hansen in Ikast, Ilse and Svend Kaa in Herning, and Poul and Elva Mathiesen in Tarm who have been so kind in allowing us to visit their houses. It has been wonderful to meet the eye witnesses to the crash; Svend Bjerregård and his late wife Gudrun, Laurids and Karen Bundgård and the late Knud Raunkjær and his lovely daughters Karen and Elsbeth and their families. I was also fortunate to meet Hans and Birgit Vestergaard. Hans was a local historian and I was greatly saddened to hear that Hans had passed away this January 2015.

Of course the other person I would particularly like to thank is Per Bonde who hosted our first reunion in 2011 and has since made Warren and me so welcome staying in his home when we have visited Denmark. Per has helped in so many other ways - taking us to visit people associated with the crash, arranging memorial plaques, buying floral tributes, and helping greatly with this reunion. We consider him to be a very dear friend.

My husband Warren and I have made five trips to Denmark - in 1986 with our two small children to stay with Naomi and Arnold Petersen in Ikast and then in 2011, 2012, 2014, and now in 2015. Each time we have been very spoilt by everyone we have met and cannot thank them enough.

My father was indeed a very lucky man to have fallen into the arms of the wonderful Danes.

Thank You

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