

Flight Lieutenant D.J. Gould,
No. 8403 Wing,
Royal Air Force.

3rd July, 1945.

Dear Locke,

Your letter of 20th July reached me only 3 days ago, but since that day I have been able to get you quite a bit on information.

Before I give you all the detail, I must say it has been no trouble to me in obtaining it, and if there is anything Mrs. Hart or relatives of the remainder of the crew would like to know, I will gladly do anything I can.

I learned from English residents in Aalborg that an English plane, presumably the Halifax you mentioned, crashed at Aalborg on the 15th October last, and that six members of the crew were killed and buried by the Germans on the edge of a wood very near the town of Aalborg, at a spot called Astre-Halne. The seventh, who survived, was hidden by people in Aalborg for two weeks, and later got out of the country and back to England.

His address is as follows:-

Wm. R. Parks,
c/o Miss Alleyne Thompson,
501, South Vickers St.
Forth William, Ontario,
Canada.

His mother's address is:-

Mrs. C.K.M. Webbe,
Heron Bay, South Ontario,
Canada.

As the date of the above crash coincides with the date you mention it appears that the six R.A.F. men buried at Ostre-Halne are Squadron Leader Hart and his crew, but you may be able to confirm this from the name of the surviving member - Wm. R. Parks.

I must add here that the above information and most of what I shall write was given to me by a New Zealand lady (married to a Dane), and who has taken it on herself to look after the burials and graves of the 24 British airmen who have lost their lives in this area.

Her name and address is:-

Mrs. Irene Vesterby,
Hassel Alle 4,
Hasseris Aalborg,
DENMARK! (Telephone Aalborg 7113).

Mrs. Vesterby is a charming lady and is really looking after the airmen's graves very well, although she has received no instructions to do so, and is now wondering that the War Graves Commission may say about her work, but I have assured her that all the relatives of the deceased men will be very grateful indeed to know of the splendid work she has done.

I contacted Mrs. Vesterby by phone on 1st July and she invited me to have tea with her on the 2nd July (yesterday) and talk the matter over, so from now on I will give you her story:-

On the 13th August, 1940, 18 British airmen lost their lives in this area, and were buried in the churchyard of a little village by the name of VADUM, only 4 miles from Aalborg. Four were known by name and buried separately, the remaining 14 were buried together in a grave adjoining the other 4 and this grave bears a cross "14 Unknown British Flyers".

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On 3rd June of this year Mrs. Vesterby arranged for the bodies of six airmen at Ostre-Halne to be taken up, properly coffined and reburied in the churchyard at VADUM with the 18 R.A.F. men, but Mrs. Vesterby has no knowledge of the names of these six and a month ago wrote to Copenhagen requesting the Government to obtain all information from the Air Ministry for the 14 unknown and the 6, making 20. The names of the 14 should be easily obtained as Danish Doctor who tended the men obtained a copy of Crew List for the whole Squadron operating (found on a body). This he retained and new copies have gone to Copenhagen. From the aircraft numbers shown the Air Ministry should be able to provide all the names.

As regards the re-burial of the 6 R.A.F. men on 3rd June 1945, I managed to get a copy of the local paper reporting it and a few snaps from Mrs. Vesterby, also a copy of the Funeral Service. Mrs. Vesterby described the funeral to me saying that she had never seen so many people at a funeral (about three thousand I gathered), and never such a touching ceremony, and this is a village churchyard, in a village of perhaps less than 200 population.

Last evening I made a trip to the churchyard to see the graves myself and I found them all laden with fresh flowers. Everyone seems to come along and put fresh flowers on the graves. During the 20 minutes I was there three young Danish girls placed fresh bunches of beautiful flowers on them; I also met several Danish people who had come from Aalberg to visit the graves.

The two diagrams I have drawn are explained as follows:-

"A" This is the layout of the graves at present. First comes the 4 known men, then a large wooden cross over the 14 unknown. The 6 reburied on June 3rd are in a grave measuring 19 metres by 3 and a half metres and the 24 are therefore in a row covering the width of the churchyard right against the path.

"B" Represents the layout when a Memorial Stone is erected. Mrs. Vesterby has obtained 10,000 Kronen in donations from local people to erect a Memorial Stone. This money is sufficient for the Memorial, and provided the remaining names are to hand in time, it will be erected ready for unveiling on 12th August 1945.

This date was chosen as the fifth anniversary of the decease of the 18 airmen on the 13th August, 1940, the ceremony being held on the 12th August, as that day is a Sunday.

I understand that an R.A.F. officer will be invited to unveil the Memorial, and it will be an impressive ceremony.

She also asked me if it would be possible for any of the relatives to be present on that day. If any can get here, Mrs. Vesterby will be very pleased to arrange accommodation with English friends in the town. They are all very eager to do everything they can.

I suggest that if Mrs. Hart and any others wish to be present, they communicate with the Air Ministry as soon as possible and I see no reason why permission should not be given. I happen to know that ships are running from Aalberg to Newcastle (for coal) and the journey is little of anything over 24 hours.

Mrs. Vesterby is arranging that sufficient photographs of the ceremony will be made for the relatives of the 24 airmen.

Here are explanations of the 5 photographs two of which I obtained from the Verger at the churchyard and the remaining 3 were given me by Mrs. Vesterby.

- (1) The six coffins (draped with Union Jacks) being taken to VADIM churchyard on June 3rd 1945.
- (2) The coffins passing the Guard of Honour.
- (3) The six coffins laid in the grave.
- (4) A supporting party of Royal Dragoons (Danish) and part of the people present.
- (5) The grave of the 14 unknown.

I think what I have said covers all I have learned, but should there be any point on which you may not be clear, I will try to explain.

I hope you can unravel most of what I have written and able to convey some information to Mrs. Hart. I will leave it to you to judge whether you wish to convey to her all that I have written, but I am sure that she would like to know that the sympathy and gratitude shown by the Danish people here for our Gallant Comrades is overwhelming.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) D.J. Gould.