

UNKNOWN AIRCRAFT IN THE SEA OFF MABLETHORPE

**Kevin Smith
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Project funded by British Sub-Aqua Jubilee Trust

The aim of this project (Unknown 4 engine Aircraft) is to examine and record the wreck site of a 4 engine British bomber from the Second World War which crashed into the North Sea with the loss of all crew. One possibly id is Halifax II (Merlin engines) R9450 of 35 Squadron, which is recorded as crashing 30 miles off Mablethorpe at 23.00 on 9 March 1942. It had taken off at 19.16 from Linton-on-Ouse, bound for Essen. The crew of 7 were never found, so R9450 must be considered a war grave. And to this date the families do not know what happened to their loved ones.

We know the crash site lies in 22m depth. We plan to take photographs and video which will record the condition of the site and conduct a side-scan sonar and on site underwater survey in an attempt to show how the aircraft met its end.

We will arrange a memorial service for the crew of R9540 (if this is found to be the correct aircraft) in recognition of the brave aircrew that were lost whilst serving in Bomber Command. The video and photographic images and all information will be put on a web site, in local libraries, and hopefully in local press articles. Copies will also be lodged in the Local Authority Historic Environment Record and English Heritage's National Monuments Record.

Project

To locate and positively record the wreck believed to be that of a Halifax Bomber registration number R9450 of 35 Squadron To produce a site map/plan of the site by reference to the position, orientation and size of the wreck.

To record details of the crash site in terms of the distinguishing features and condition etc including photographs and video.

To research the circumstances of the wreck incident.

To observe and record the typical marine life to be found on the site.

To work with the RAF and the BAAC (British Aviation Archaeological Society) to arrange a suitable memorial service as one of the final acts of remembrance.

Outreach

To make available a public record of our work through dissemination of the report to various public bodies and interested organisations.

To publicise the results of our work as widely as possible.

To publicise the story of the loss of the Halifax Bomber registration number R9450 of 35 Squadron and her crew.

To work with other organisations and the general public to exchange information about Bombing raids in the second world war and to raise awareness of recreational diving in the North Sea and the profile of BSAC

GENERAL INFORMATION

Military Branch	Royal Air Force
Manufacturer	Handley Page
Model	Halifax
Serial number	R9450
Identifier	TL-K
Squadron	Squadron 35
Serial Range	R9418 - R9457. 40 Halifax Mk.11
Start Airport	Linton on Ouse
Destination	Essen
Date	03/09/1942

Kevin Smith first became aware of the crash site when diving with the French Navy during an expedition to find the wreck of HMS Haldene (La Combattant). The site is fairly intact and appears to have lain undisturbed since it crashed. It was very evident that this was a RAF Bomber from the Second World War

The Dive Sites

Dive site 1 – UKHO Site 66921

53 21 90N 001 00 18E

First surveyed in 22 26.10.05 LANCASTER BOMBER LOCATED IN 5321.907N, 0100.187E [WGD] BY DIVERS FROM FRENCH NAVAL VESSEL CMT PEGASE INVESTIGATING WRECK OF LA COMBATTENTE. FULL REPORT TO FOLLOW. (KEVIN SMITH/G FURSE TELECON 24.10.05) NCA YET AWAIT REPORT, POSN FOR FILING ONLY.

We started research into this aircraft on the internet and joined various sites to find out more. Then a visit to Yorkshire Air Museum on 4 July 2013 to look at a Halifax Bomber, we took some photos to give us some idea what we might find at the crash site, i.e. distinguishing items etc we also measured the plane so we would know if it was a Halifax.

After many failed attempts during the year to go back to this site we got our wish on September 23rd 2013. We left Cleethorpes beach at about 7.30 in the morning travelling the 40.5 miles to the site at a good speed, it was overcast but dry with a very light wind, the crew consisted of Kevin Smith, Gary Bexon, Andy Booth, Paul Fuller, Pete Wardle and Matty Young. Our travel time was about 2 hours we searched all around the French Navy co-ordinates and after a while had some good readings on the sonar, not very big but we expected this as we had thought that the only thing that would stand proud above the seabed would be the engines.

We dropped a marker buoy and waited for slack water which is quite different from our normal dive sites being 3 to 5 hours either side of high water at Cleethorpes. As

we sat there having lunch we were visited by a large number of seals possible 30 to 50 of them, one young pup was quite inquisitive and gradually plucked up the courage to come alongside our boat and show us his underside.

The dive went according to plan and at 20 metres the first divers settled on the seabed, but with visibility of 2 metres cloudy and with quite a strong current running they only managed to get a poor video of one of the engines; it was a 9 cylinder radial engine with metal propellor. All the rest of the divers failed to find anything other than a small amount of wreckage.

Just as we were about to leave for home the highlight of the day arrived in the form of a 7 to 8 metre Minke Whale which swam around our boat for several minutes giving all of us a great display and one that no one had seen before.

When we returned home we researched the engines and confirmed that the one seen was a Bristol Pegasus 9 cylinder radial engine, this told us that it was not the Halifax bomber as we had first thought, as the engines of Halifax R9450 were Merlin engines not radial engines. It was now a question of what is this aircraft and now we had more questions than answers. Went to RAF Hendon 11th June 2014.

On our second visit in 22nd June 2014 we had a crew of Kevin Smith, Gary Bexon, Mark Clarke, Raf Bekalski, and Matty Young we had another good trip down to the site and now had a better knowledge of where the aircraft was, soon it was on our sonar screen, a marker buoy was sent down and when the first pair reached the bottom they were delighted to have about 5 to 6 metres visibility.

They started a circular search of the area and found that the site has been extensively trawled and nets are draped over the engines, it is well spread and the seabed is loose gravel but hard a few inches down. They quickly discovered two more engines close together with associated wreckage, one of which one is in a very poor state having lost most of its cylinders and casings. This leads us to think that this engine suffered a major mechanical disintegration. We have now seen 3 of the four engines and all have their propeller blades attached and are not bent, this indicates that the aircraft landed and sunk rather than crashed into the sea with its engines running, as this would have shown bent propellers. This is definitely a four engine early WW2 aircraft possibly 1939/40. The wreckage nearby showed 303 bullets in the gravel as well as in drums of about 150mm diameter around about where the nose of the craft would have been, the markings on the bottom of these 303 bullets were RL 1937 or RL 1940 which when researched told us that they were from the Royal Woolwich Arsenal.

The radio and other items recovered by the French Navy support this and our research from items seen on the site also confirms that this is an early WW2 aircraft possible 1939/1940. The radio which is a Gee 1082/1083 Transmitter/Receiver and other items indicate an early WW2.

The ammunition in drums which is located near the nose of the aircraft shows that the armament in the nose was a Vickers gas powered gun these were fitted on only one early WW2 4 engine aircraft.

There is also a large amount of aluminium wreckage about the site and numerous artefacts but no sign of any landing gear or tyres.

For our third visit in 3rd September 2014 we again had a good journey to the site with Kevin Smith, Gary Bexon, Andy Booth, and Pete Hemmingway.

The visibility was an excellent 6 to 8 metres and we had time to film the site and show more of the wreckage, after a through swim around the area and finding the fourth engine we are now certain that this aircraft is a Mark 1 Sunderland flying boat. All the

artefacts including the ammunition drums, for the Vickers Gas Powered gun, that was fitted in the nose of the Mark 1 Sunderland and the four Pegasus engines (the only aircraft fitted with four Pegasus engines was a Sunderland flying Boat), Proves without doubt that this is a Mark 1 Sunderland, but all our research cannot identify which one it is, the RAF and The Sunderland Flying Boat Trust at Pembroke Dock who have been very helpful in our project have no knowledge of any Sunderland's missing in this area, and at the time of this report we are still trying to identify which aircraft it is.

We will carry on our search to identify this Sunderland and will visit the site again in 2015 to see if we can find any more information on why this iconic aircraft is there. Only 75 Mark 1 Sunderland's were built so it might be a process of elimination to find out which one we have found.