

FINAL FLIGHTS

Dramatic wartime incidents
revealed by aviation archaeology

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Stewart Evans (left) and Paul Crickmore struggle to remove a section of Liberator armour plating from a pond at Benacre, Suffolk.

mystery but fragments from the lost bomber are still scattered across the farmland — did she foresee people searching over four decades later?

Whether they believed in predicting the future or not, many airmen were superstitious but orders were orders whatever the date. On 13 March 1944, the diary of the 93rd BG, 409th Squadron, Hardwick: 'Back to France again — this time to La Pol. Our luck holds no longer; on the way to the target, a dozen miles or so from the airdrome, one of our ships, piloted by First Lieutenant Alfred C. Chamberlain, of Ellsworth, Maine, crashed. The pilot was using instruments and it is believed the ship stalled and went into a spin from which it never recovered. Miraculously, four of the enlisted men on the crew escaped alive. The wreckage was found south of Lowestoft.'

In fact, the bomber seems to have broken up as it fell and pieces were strewn over a wide area around Benacre. During 1971/72, several searches

occurred and, pumping water from a pond, we removed a well-preserved section of armour plating, printed on which were cruise control instructions and other technical details for B-24J, 42-100363. This came from the flight deck but the pond also yielded a waist gun, propeller blade, bomb fin and belts of ammunition. From another pond, two fields away, Pete Snowling hauled out one of the Twin Wasp engines. This had originally fallen in the field and lay for some time until farmworkers rolled it out of their way and dumped it in the pond.

In case this book gives the wrong impression, most aircraft were salvaged at the time. Taken near Bury St Edmunds, on 27 March 1944, pictures show a thorough dismantling job underway on Halifax LW671. Based at Snaith, Yorkshire, this 51 Squadron aircraft attempted to land at Rougham but overshoot and crashed, happily without serious crew injuries. No aviation archaeologist need waste time on that