

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

HANDLEY PAGE HALIFAX B.MK.II SERIES I W1048/8465M
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 73/A/1113

- 1942 Built by English Electric Ltd, Samlesbury, near Preston to contract No.B982938/39, requisition 116/E11/39 for 200 Halifax aircraft, delivered from 5 Sep 41. V9976-W1276 including serial number block W1035-W1067. Four Merlin XX engines. English Electric built 2,145 of the total Halifax production of 6,178 aircraft; 1,966 of these were the Mk.II variant.
- 27 Mar 42 Taken on charge by No.102 Squadron, normally based at RAF Topcliffe but then on detachment to Dalton, North Yorkshire and in the process of converting to Halifaxes from Whitley Vs. Fuselage code DY-S.
- 09 Apr 42 Six Halifax II aircraft, including W1048, were ferried by RAF pilots from Topcliffe to the No.35 Squadron base at RAF Linton-on-Ouse, Yorkshire and exchanged for six No.35 Squadron aircraft fitted with the Gee radio navigation aid. As the forthcoming operation would be outside the range of Gee stations it was decided not to risk the loss of sets on operations. Ferried by Pilot Officer Batch-Elder DFM in exchange for R9494, which was flown back to 102 Squadron at Dalton. W1048 was coded TL-S with her new unit. (S-Sugar).
- 15 Apr 42 Flown by PO Don MacIntyre on 1hr 20 minute training sortie around Filey Bay, with another sortie of the same duration that evening to practice low-level bombing on the Strensall range.
- 22 Apr 42 Low-level bombing flight – Strensall Range.
- 23 Apr 42 11 Halifaxes including W1048 flew from Linton to RAF Kinloss, Scotland, as the advance base for their forthcoming raid on the 52,000-ton German battleship Tirpitz which lay in Norwegian waters at the extreme limit of the Halifaxes' range. Tirpitz was a threat to allied convoys in the North Atlantic and it was hoped to disable her.
- 27 Apr 42 At 2030 hours W1048 took off on her first operational mission as the 7th of the 11 No.35 Squadron Halifaxes airborne from Kinloss. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after take-off.

Her crew for this mission were:

Pilot Plt Off Don P MacIntyre (a 24 year old Canadian)

Observer Plt Off Ian Hewitt (Also operated as bomb aimer and Navigator, had been commissioned 23 Mar 42; posted to No.35 Squadron 31 Mar 42; later received the DFC and became a Squadron Leader navigator with the Pathfinder Force; a chartered accountant in later life, he died in June 2015, aged 94).

1st WOP/AG 908781 Sgt Dave Perry

2nd WOP/AG R56057 Sgt Pierre Blanchet (Mid upper gunner. A Canadian)

Tail Gunner 633143 Sgt Ron Wilson (A London cabby in later life)

Flight Engineer 524209 Sgt Vic Stevens.

W1048 was part of a total force of 31 Halifaxes drawn also from Nos.10 and 76 Squadrons. The No.10 Squadron aircraft carried 4000lb bombs, as did those of No.76 squadron, these intended specifically to attack the defences of Foettenfjord (modern day Fetfjorden) near Trondheim where the Tirpitz was moored. Twelve Lancasters of Nos.44 and 97 Squadrons were to bomb the area from 4000 feet. W1048 and the other No.35 Squadron aircraft each carried four 1000lb (454kg) modified Royal Navy type 19N spherical mines, which at 31 inches diameter did not quite fit into the bomb bay, meaning that the bomb doors did not fully close; when the Halifaxes were flying, the groundcrews said they looked like pregnant mayflies. It was hoped that the mines would roll down the steep slopes of the Fjord into the 50 foot gap between Tirpitz and the shore, sink and damage the more vulnerable underside of the ship below the waterline since the decks were heavily armoured. Also carried were two 250lb General Purpose bombs for attacking the Flak defences. For account of the attack, see Aeroplane July 2008 pp.18 – 22.

W1048 was the 8th aircraft to attack, being on target at 0030 hours; pilot Don MacIntyre had arranged to fly in formation with his friend Reg Lane, and they had agreed that whoever was leading at the target would go in first – as McIntyre was in the lead as they reached the initial point, he went in first (Flypast December 2009 p.75). Tirpitz was rapidly obscured by a smoke screen, but W1048 shallow dived to 200ft to release her mines; immediately afterwards the aircraft was hit by flak, which was intense from both Tirpitz and shore batteries, and the starboard outer engine and wing mounted fuel tanks and surrounding wing structure set alight as the aircraft ran in at 200 feet.

The pilot, Don MacIntyre, quickly realised that W1048 was so badly damaged it could not reach base or neutral Sweden; he therefore made a skilful wheels-up landing on the frozen surface of nearby Lake Hoklingen in central Norway 25 miles east of Trondheim. W1048 had just 13 hours flying time in her logbook. The six crew escaped from the aircraft when it had slithered to a halt, the only injury being to Sgt Stevens who broke his ankle during the crash. He was helped over the 150 yards of ice to the shore by the others and was later taken POW and hospitalised by the Germans. The rest of the crew, aided by Norwegian resistance, reached neutral Sweden after a three-day hike; Hewitt and MacIntyre were repatriated after a few weeks, Perry, Blanchet and Wilson after about a year, Wilson renting a flat and working in Sweden for a while!

Some twelve hours after the crash W1048 sank through the ice in the southern corner of the lake. Three other Halifaxes were lost during the raid including W1020 also from No.35

squadron, plus one Lancaster. The Tirpitz was undamaged.

- 28 Apr 42 W1048 reported as Cat E missing - now lying in 92 feet (27m) of water.
- 29 Apr 42 Struck off charge.
- 28/29 Apr 42 A repeat raid was made, again with no damage to the Tirpitz. Of 23 Halifaxes and 11 Lancasters despatched, two Halifaxes, both of No.35 Squadron, were lost - the Squadron had despatched nine aircraft following the loss of two the previous night, so had lost a third of its strength in two night raids on the Tirpitz.
- 1971 W1048 found and marked by local divers.
- Sep 72 Members of the RAF Sub Aqua Club made several exploratory dives in Lake Hoklingen to examine the Halifax. Authority was given for No.71 MU Bicester to beach, dismantle and transport the aircraft back to the UK as Expedition Training- it was found to be in good condition apart from missing the starboard outer engine, which had been hit by flak – the dive team did look for this but it was never found.
There was also some damage by divers taking souvenirs in the past.
Other parts had found odd uses – the tailwheel tyre being used to hold a flower arrangement at an isolated farm and was recovered by the team – the farmer had spotted it floating on the surface of the lake.
It was spotted by the then British Defence and Air Attaché at Oslo, Wing Commander Tim de Salis, who then contacted the Air Historical Branch, with the result that the aircraft was identified and recovered.
- 19 Jun 73 Team of 16 divers, civilian the late Peter Cornish of the British Sub Aqua Club and 15 RAF Sub-Aqua Club personnel, the latter led by Sgt Dave Walker and a No.71 MU Bicester advance party led by WO J.W. Davis flew out to Norway in a RAF Hercules C1 for 'Operation Halifax' to recover W1048, the first familiarisation dive being made the following day. The RAF team were aided by Norwegian divers from the Draugen Froskemannsklub (diving club) Trondheim. Following a suggestion by Peter Cornish, lift was to be provided by over 50 borrowed 40 gallon oil drums which, after attachment to the wing and tail spars, were to be filled with compressed air. See also 'Ever Better the history of 71 Maintenance unit RAF (Wise, 2003)
- 27 Jun 73 First lift; aircraft sank again and starboard outer wing broke off during another lift two days later. (recovered a few days later).
- 30 Jun 73 Successful lift; aircraft broke surface of the lake at 1410 hours and was towed $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the nearest beaching site by a borrowed powerboat. It was brought up the beach using a wooden sledge under the aircraft and an aluminium trackway, using bulldozers to tow the aircraft out of the water.
- Much of the paint on W1048 peeled off once the aircraft had been exposed to the air, and the aircraft's back was broken. Found in the aircraft were 8000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, the navigator's gloves folded nearly in his table drawer, survival rations and first aid kits.

When connected to a battery, the instrument panel lights lit up. The engines could still be turned by hand. Photos of recovery: Aviation News Vol.2 No.7; Aircraft Illustrated Sep 73 p.350-351; Air Enthusiast Oct 73 p.182; Airfix Magazine Sep 73 p.35-6; Air Clues October 1973 pp. 30 – 34; Air Extra No.3 P.34; FlyPast Oct 82 p.25-28; FlyPast Oct 92 p.48-9; Aeroplane Monthly Sep 73 p.228-230; Raider (023521) p.31-2; Air Classics Nov 76 p.62-67; Aeroplane May 2003 p.74 and MP00496-500; Ever Better – the History of No 71 Mu RAF (wise) pp.49-50.

The mid upper turret cupola was recovered from a local farmer's barn.

One link of ammunition, 'souvenired' at the time and acquired by the Museum in 1997 (1997/0046/O) featured ammunition dating from 1929, 1931, 1936, 1938, and 1940, made in the UK, Australia and India!

Once beached the aircraft was defueled and dismantled by a 10-man team from No.71 MU for sea transport to the UK via Levanger and Ipswich. Photo during dismantling -FlyPast Oct 82 p.29 and Epics of Aviation Archaeology (006874) p.85.

25 Aug 73 Arrived at Ipswich Docks on a Royal Corps of Transport LCT after a rough crossing and taken to Henlow by No.71 MU. Photos: Epics of Aviation Archaeology p.86; Royal Air Force News w/e 15 September 1973 p.9.

11 Feb 76 Allotted RAF Maintenance serial 8465M

Jul 77 Nose section removed from Henlow to RAF Wyton for restoration by volunteers. Following a partial collapse of the under fuselage structure when an attempt was made to trestle up the nose section it was decided to limit restoration to the nose turret cupola, throttle box, pilots' instrument panel and flight engineers panel.
Photos at Wyton - FlyPast Jan 82 and FlyPast Oct 82 p.27-28.

It was later decided that due to the effort and expense required, a full restoration would not be attempted and that the aircraft would be displayed unrestored as a tribute to bomber crews of World War 2. As the aircraft had lain in a fresh water lake, although fabric had rotted from the control surfaces, cabin transparencies had distorted and magnesium alloy parts had corroded, the duralumin structure was in good condition, with little rust.

27 Nov 81 Restored front turret cupola taken to RAFM Hendon for launch of appeal for funds to build the Bomber Command Museum by Sir Arthur Harris - the turret was delivered by a Puma helicopter of No.3 Squadron.
Photo: Aeroplane Monthly Jan 82 p.2.

1980-1989 Port outer engine, s/n 52477 restored by the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society at Rochester Airport. The engine was taken from Henlow to Rochester in February 1980. It was built by Rolls Royce at Glasgow; when analysed by BP the oil in the crankcase was found to be still usable. The engine was fully stripped and rebuilt from the ground

up; although some exterior components were corroded the interior remained in good condition.

The engine starter motor was restored to working order and actually used in a Spitfire for a flight from West Malling to Duxford when the Spitfires own starter motor failed. Articles on engine restoration - FlyPast Feb 82 p.30-31; FlyPast Dec 89 p.25. (The engine was delivered to Hendon 1989 and remains displayed adjacent to the Halifax).

1982

Aircraft delivered to RAFM from Henlow and initially stored in the car park pending completion of the Bomber Command Museum. Photo in car park; Scale Models Nov 82 p.554.

Photos during installation in Museum: and MP00491-494; Air Extra 39 p.21; FlyPast Nov 82 p.3. Photos as displayed at Hendon: FlyPast Jan 93 p.56 and December 2008 p.95; Scale Models Jun 87 p.271 and 294; Aeroplane August 2008 p.85.

Visitors will notice the red inhibitor sprayed over the structure to arrest further corrosion after exposure to air. Undergoing ongoing conservation work by aircraft team from RAFM Society of Friends.

A number of components including DF loop, bomb-aimer's nose framing, cheek window and nose panel were refitted during 2013, and the fully restored port outer engine bearer and radiator returned to Hendon from MAPS at Rochester in early 2014.

Other Surviving Halifax Aircraft

R9371 B.II Ex CARG/Tony Southern. Cockpit floor/side section only – to RAFM Stafford 2007.

HR792/LV907' Mk.III Yorkshire Air Museum. Composite restoration, using 25ft/7.72m section of rear fuselage from Halifax MK.II HR792, recovered from the Outer Hebrides in May 1984, and Hastings centre section and inner wings ex Hastings C.1A TG536 plus an unused set of Hastings outer wings.

NA142 Met. III 14 feet long rear fuselage portion airlifted from Isle of Lewis (where it had served as a henhouse) to Canada to aid in restoration of NA337 June 1997.

NA337 A.VII RCAF Memorial Museum, Trenton, Ontario, Canada. (Salvaged from a Norwegian lake, as was W1048). Photo- Flypast December 2004 p.10 and December 2008 pp.96-97. Crashed April 1945 as 2P-X of 644 Squadron. Fully restored by 2005.

PN323 A.VII IWM South Lambeth (moved to IWM Duxford September 2012). Nose/forward fuselage section only, ex Radlett 1961, Skyfame.

A further submerged airframe was found in 2014;

A research team from the Marine Technology Centre at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway has discovered the sunken wreck of an RAF Handley Page Halifax under roughly 180m of water on the bottom of a nearby fjord.

The aircraft is very likely Halifax Mk II W7656 of No 35 Squadron, lost on 28 April 1942 while attacking the German battleship Tirpitz. Two crewmen, Sgt.Columbine (navigator) and Sgt. Evans (W/Op & Gunner), perished in the crash. See Britain at War magazine Dec 2014 p.12.

TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON

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