

The crash of Handley-Page Halifax Mk V DG390

on the 16th of May 1943

Thanks to Simon Randell, Les White and Alan Brown for providing pieces of the story

The Halifax was a glider tug from 295 Squadron RAF and was lost whilst was on a low-level ten-minute flight from Hurn to Holmsley South when it crashed, due to engine failure. The crash occurred about halfway between RAF Hurn and RAF Holmsley South, just northeast of the former RAF Radar station at Sopley in Thatchers Lane, northwest of Bransgore, OS grid reference SZ164986. It was particularly tragic because it was ferrying back army glider pilots in addition to its own crew.

All seven of those on board died in the crash, four RAF Crewmen and three members of the 5 Sqn 1 Battalion Army Glider Pilot Regiment. They were

J10798 Fg-Offr Donald J Smith RCAF (Pilot)

J10509 Fg-Offr M W Collins RCAF (Pilot)

Barrie Noel Stephenson RAFVR (Flight Engineer).

Fg-Offr P S Thomas (Gunner)

1458928 Sgt Davies, Francis Joseph

4446357 Sgt Sunter, Roland Davies (Geordie)

1485758 Sgt Borton, Ronald Herbert

In 1943, 296 Squadron at Hurn (the Glider Exercise Squadron) were preparing for Operation Beggar, an exercise to ferry Horsa gliders to North Africa for use in the invasion of Sicily. The gliders were due leave

the UK from Portreath in Cornwall in late May 1943. The Glider tugs would be from 295 squadron at Holmsley South, using modified Halifax tugs with extra fuel tanks in their bomb bays. The bomb bays were sealed to give extra flotation capability, if the aircraft had to ditch in the Atlantic Ocean, on the way. 295 squadron lost three Halifaxes whilst at Holmsley, including DG390.

Sid Burt, a fighter pilot on leave at his home in Bransgore was preparing to go to church on the morning of Sunday 16 May. He described what happened. "I heard the increase in revs of a passing "Halli". On looking out, it was at about five hundred feet in a very steep turn with the nose down. I remember saying to my Dad, "That kite is going to prang." and I started to run in the direction across the fields. In fact, I was the second person on the spot, the first being a gamekeeper`s wife who lived in the area. It actually crashed in the road (Thatcher`s Lane) midway between Shirley and Ripley School - there were no survivors." He went on to describe how a small crowd gathered, oblivious, it appeared, to the danger of exploding ammunition from the aircraft`s guns. "They came dashing in thinking they could be bloody heroes and we had a job stopping them but of course there was the heat of the fire and we didn`t know what else was on board."

A glider pilot at Holmsley South, Staff Sgt Gordon Jenks, also witnessed the accident. He watched the Halifax leave. The Horsa crew were on board the Halifax. After departure the Halifax suddenly had fumes coming from one of the port engines followed by an explosion in the engine. The Halifax disappeared in pall of smoke. Gordon Jenks was a former dance band trumpeter, and he played the Last Post and Reveille at the funeral of the crew and his glider pilot colleagues. "

Three of the Halifax aircrew were buried at Bransgore Parish Church.

