

following a Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) search. Bjørg Gjolmesli describes the discovery. "In April last I went onboard the research ship, M/V 'Gunnerus', belonging to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim to show them what I had on wrecks in the fjord. The most important object, and the one which I had eyewitnesses to, was Casson's Skua. So I gave them all the info that I had, and I left the ship with the feeling that they would try to find it when they carried out tests of different equipment for other companies. The price per hour for using the ship varies on different jobs, but they gave me a price of 25- 40,000 kroner an hour (US\$ 4,965-7,940), and there was no way that we could raise that amount of money!"

Luckily, all the information was sent to Marine-Teck at the university and they made this into a research task for the students. Then one day they called to inform me that they were ready to do a search on 24-25 April. The 24th was cancelled, so we only had the one day available.

I went to see one of the witnesses, Johs Halsen (81), and told him to go to the position from where he saw the ditching and to bring his mobile phone. Mr. Nodland (87), who picked up the crew in his rowing boat joined us on the bridge of 'Gunnerus' and pointed out the approximate position where the aircraft sank. Mr. Halsen called us from the shore and told us where to start the search. We soon got a very good 'fix' and in fact we started the search less than 100 meters from the wreck, such was the accuracy of these two old men's memories!

It was exciting to be there. All the students were sitting around the TV screens making notes. To see their faces and hear their reaction when the wing appeared on screen was fantastic".



Ashore at Trondheim harbour and one of the wings shows off its RAF roundel.

UP SHE COMES!

Birger Larsen describes the operation to raise Skua L2896 from the ocean floor.

"7th April 2008, and the first phase of the recovery of Skua L2896 (Green 'A') was performed in Orkdalsfjord close to Trondheim. Because of bad weather on this day, time was spent in surveying the condition of the wreck as well as planning the recovery. The wreck was at a depth of 242 meters perched on a cliff ready to slide down an additional 200 meters, one wing reaching out into the void! A shift in the position of the wreck could see it disappear into the void and be lost, meaning ROV operation was limited because of the narrow space between the sea bottom and the wing. To make matters even worse, close to the trailing edge of the right wing was another cliff making it difficult to operate the ROV. Loose silt reduced the visibility, sometimes

to zero, when the ROV came close to the bottom which slowed down the work of connecting the lifting straps even more.

The original plan was to raise the Skua in a horizontal position and a special steel frame was made so that the tail end of the aircraft could be supported during the lift operation. We knew from the surveys on the 7th that the tail of the Skua was a problem because most of the rivets were gone and only connection to the rest of the airframe were the steel control cables. However any attempt to supporting the tail more securely would mean an extra day of ROV operations. We did not have that extra day. 'Gunnerus' was scheduled for other operations on the 9th, therefore the lift had to be undertaken despite the risk of parts from the tail section falling off.

Late in the evening on the 8th the ROV pilot had completed the strapping of the wreck and the Skua could start its journey back to the surface. Almost at once, the centre piece of the tail broke off, separating the tail plane from the fuselage.

Over the years much silt had collected inside in the area of the open aft cockpit and this contributed to a rather heavy load aft of the main spars. Due to the rather frail condition of this area and the weight of the accumulated silt, the lifting straps tore into the structure and made the front section turn to a nose up position for the rest of the lift, which unfortunately resulted in the loss of several parts of the structure needed for the reconstruction of the aft cockpit area. However the winching of the Skua to the surface was performed without problems. Upon surfacing the wreck was transferred to the crane barge in a relatively short period of time and taken ashore.

The above operation was made possible by the use of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) vessel 'Gunnerus',

enough parts to help a third museum in a rebuild if required, and a joint project between museums will cut the cost of rebuilding and bring the possibilities for Skuas on display in several countries very much closer to a reality.

Thanks to Birger Larsen and Bjørg Gjolmesli

NB: If anyone has period photos of 803 Sqdn. Skuas or any parts that may help the proposed restoration please contact the CW office.

Blackburn Skua II (L2490)

The remains of Skua L2940, raised and recovered at Groth, Norway in 1974, are preserved the way it was found on the bottom of Breidalsvatnet Lake. This aircraft was built in late April 1939 and allocated to 800 Naval Air Sqdn. being flown to HMS 'Ark Royal' on 23rd April 1940. It was during the 2 hour 5 min. flight on the 27th April that the crew engaged a Heinkel He111 bomber over Norway but then suffered engine failure and

put down on frozen Lake Breidal, both Capt. Partridge RM and Lt. RS Bostock being unhurt. The cockpit area was set alight to destroy aircraft and the wreck sank through the ice, being discovered again by a sub aqua club in August 1973. In July the following year the wreck was recovered by the Naval Air Command Sub Aqua Club, it eventually arriving at the Fleet Air Arm Museum on 13th April 1975.



Rob Leigh



Rob Leigh

On display at the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton, UK is the substantial remains of Skua L2490 which was also recovered from Norway in 1974, from Lake Breidal. The aircraft had sunk into the frozen lake following an attempt to destroy it by setting fire to the cockpit following a forced landing.



The centre section is a vital part of this wreck, as this is missing from the parts cache in Norway, and also from the recovered remains at the FAA Museum, Yeovilton