

50 YEARS ON

# RAF called in to tackle bomb find

FORTY-SEVEN years ago a German Dornier 217 was shot down over Kingsley Green on its way to bomb Southampton. Its highly explosive cargo, one of the largest caches of second world war bombs ever found, has been moved from woodland on Friday's Hill by the RAF.

In a delicate, week long operation, bomb disposal experts from E.O.D. Operation Flight, RAF Wittering, Peterborough, have moved the load, which included five 50 kilo and two huge 500 kilo bombs, to a field at Henley where they are defusing them.

The bombs were found when aviation archaeologists went in search of the plane which older villagers remember being shot down by an RAF fighter.

One of the crew, all young men in their early twenties, was killed but the rest escaped and were later sent to a prisoner-of-war camp.

## Highly explosive

The remains of the plane and its dangerous load were buried deep in the woodland and it was while digging it out that the amateur archaeologists found the bombs still in good condition after nearly 50 years in the ground.

But the find presented problems for the bomb disposal team headed by Warrant Officer Doc Knights.

The two 500 kilo bombs were, he admitted, the biggest German bombs he had ever seen.

They were, he explained, highly explosive and if they and the other smaller bombs had gone off they would have devastated a large area of Kingsley Green.

The six man team had to defuse the bombs on site before they could be moved. The two larger ones were the most dangerous to deal with as they carry a 17 inch clockwork fuse which sudden movement could set into action.

"Bearing in mind the bombs had to be scooped out of the ground by a JCB digger and we

had no idea what condition they might be in after all that time, we had to treat things very delicately," said WO Knights.

Gently, the team moved the smaller bombs and then the two larger ones, with Doc sitting on top of one of them, were transported down the main road to the Henley field. "Any jolt or pot hole might have set it off as the Germans often included a second trigger fuse or device to explode it even if the main fuse was removed," he said.

This week the team are "boiling the bombs" to extract the explosive. It requires a lot of heat and water — and a lot of nerve. And, like an egg, they are timed. A smaller bomb takes three hours but the larger ones need a full eight hours.

"Until the job is complete," said WO Knights, "the bombs could still go off at any time and there would be a fair old explosion. When we start to boil the bigger bombs, once we have got them in position, we will make sure we stand well back."

The field, where they have set up a tent where they can make meals and cups of tea and coffee, is perfect for the job. It is secluded, well screened by trees and well away from houses and farm buildings.

## Controlled explosions

"There will be some explosions," he confirmed, "but only controlled ones when we detonate the fuses. Some people might hear a dull thud."

WO Knights and his men are part of a 25 man team, the only bomb disposal experts in the country, who can be called to any part of Britain at a moment's notice.

They deal with all types of bombs from those planted by the IRA to those dropped in the second world war.

Modestly WO Knights, who served in the Falklands, dismisses

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