

Lost WW2 aircraft lifted from the sea after more than 75 Years

A WW2 plane which crashed into the sea more than 75 years ago, has been lifted from the water.

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This week, specialist divers and archaeologists completed an operation to retrieve the wreckage of a 1943 Fairey Barracuda Torpedo Bomber (believed to be No. BV739) - just in time for the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

The three-seater plane, part of 810 Squadron Royal Navy Air Station, based at Lee-On-Solent is believed to have got into difficulty shortly after taking off for its test flight before crashing 500m from the coast in Portsmouth.

It was found by National Grid engineers last summer during a seabed survey ahead of the construction of new subsea electricity cable between England and France.

The cable, called an interconnector, will be buried in the seabed and will stretch for 240km between Fareham, Portsmouth and Normandy, France and deliver cleaner, cheaper and more secure energy for UK consumers. The UK government has targeted 9.5 GW of additional interconnector capacity in its Clean Growth Strategy. This is because interconnectors are recognised as a key tool in enabling the flow of excess zero carbon energy from where it is generated where it is needed most.

The Barracuda wreckage is the only one to have ever been found in one piece and the last remaining aircraft of its kind in the UK.

David Luetchford, Head of IFA2 for National Grid said: "Interconnectors are about bringing us closer to a zero-carbon future, but we must also respect the past. An important part of our job is to always have a thorough and sympathetic approach to archaeological finds. Over the course of the project we've inspected over 1,000 targets of interest, many of which were found to be unexploded ordnance, not unusual given the history of this location. However, to have found a 1943 Fairey Barracuda torpedo bomber is incredible and such a key piece of British history.

It's not every day you get the chance to play a role in an operation like this and it is very lucky to have found the plane in such a small search area. We surveyed a 180-metre-wide area along the cable route and if we had chosen a slightly different route, there is a good chance the plane would never have been found."

Work to fully retrieve the plane is expected to take around three weeks in total as experts from Wessex Archaeology are carefully excavating the area around the aircraft and removing large amounts of silt and clay.

So far, one of the wings has successfully been lifted out of the waters and work on the second is currently underway. The remainder of the plane will be recovered by lifting it in sections over the coming days.

Wessex Archaeology lead archaeologist Euan McNeil said: "Our team has been working closely with all those involved to ensure that any risks to heritage assets on the

seafloor are mitigated. This aircraft is a rare find and a fantastic opportunity to understand more about a piece of wartime technology.

"We have been undertaking the excavation under a licence from the MoD, and it has taken careful planning to ensure that we lift the remains and any associated material which may have been scattered as it sank – without causing its condition to deteriorate significantly. This has involved excavating the silt around the plane and sieving it for artefacts, then carefully dividing the remaining structure into manageable sections for lifting.

"The recovery of the Fairey Barracuda will aid an ongoing Fleet Air Arm Museum project to recreate what will be the world's only complete example of this type of aircraft. This will give us a chance to examine a unique lost piece of aviation history"

Once retrieved, the parts will be taken to the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Museum in Somerset where it will be studied and used to rebuild a full-size Barracuda in the site's aircraft hangar.

David Morris, Curator at The National Museum of the Royal Navy has been working on the project for several years and visited four other Barracuda crash sites to retrieve suitable parts.

He said: "This is an incredible find and a wonderful piece of British history. There are very few blueprints of the Barracuda plane design available so this wreckage will be studied to enable us to see how the plane segments fitted together and how we can use some of the parts we currently have.

"This find is a huge step forward for our project and we can't wait to get it back to the museum and share our findings with the public."

The plane's pilot has been named as SUB LNT DJ Williams who managed to escape the crash and survived WW2.

The team at Wessex Archaeology are currently trying to trace SUB LNT Williams and are keen for anyone with information about the pilot and his family to get in touch on 01722 326867.

National Grid has invested over £2bn in offshore interconnectors, making energy more secure, affordable and sustainable for consumers across Great Britain and Europe. There are currently three interconnectors in operation and three under construction.

The Interconnexion France-Angleterre 2 (IFA2) is National Grid's second electricity subsea interconnector to France and is a joint venture with French System Operator RTE. It follows the success of IFA which had been running since 1986. Once live, it will provide an additional 1GW of capacity – enough electricity to power a million homes and play a vital role in decarbonising the UK's energy system.

Interconnectors deliver secure and affordable electricity and will play a critical role in tomorrow's cleaner and smarter energy systems. By 2025 almost 90% of electricity imported via interconnectors will be from zero carbon sources with enough flexible capacity to power a third of homes in the UK.

For further details, please contact National Grid Press Officers - Sara Revell: sara.revell@nationalgrid.com / Simmie Korotane: Simmie.korotane@nationalgrid.com / 01926 653962.





Picture Captions:

Barracuda plane lift L -R: Emma Devlin (National Grid's IFA2 project), David Morris (Curator at The National Museum of the Royal Navy) and Jake Stevens (National Grid's IFA2 project).

Barracuda plane lift: wing close up – A close up of part of the Barracuda wing which has been lifted from the sea

Barracuda plane lift: boats on water – Retrieval boat and dive barge for the operation

Barracuda plane lift: wing out of water – Part of the wing emerges from the sea lifted by the crane

Contact for media information only

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Notes for editors

To view and download footage and interviews from the Barracuda plane lifting [click here](#). Please ensure to credit National Grid for any video footage you use.

About Interconnectors

A subsea interconnector is a cable which is buried under the sea between two countries to connect two energy systems and allow the sharing of electricity.

National Grid currently has three interconnectors in operation:

IFA (UK to France), BritNed (UK to The Netherlands) and Nemo Link (UK to Belgium) which became operational in January 2019.

The company's North Sea Link interconnector is currently under construction and will join the UK with Norway when it goes live at the end of 2021. It will provide 1.4GW of capacity.

National Grid Ventures is also working on Viking Link which is currently in development.

The 1.4 GW interconnector will join the UK with Denmark.

Notes to Editors:

National Grid is pivotal to the energy systems in the UK and the north eastern United States. We aim to serve customers well and efficiently, supporting the communities in which we operate and making possible the energy systems of the future.

National Grid in the UK:

- We own and operate the electricity transmission network in England and Wales, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. We also operate, but do not own, the Scottish networks. Our networks comprise approximately 7,200 kilometres (4,474 miles) of overhead line, 1,500 kilometres (932 miles) of underground cable and 342 substations.
- We own and operate the gas National Transmission System in Great Britain, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. Our network comprises approximately 7,660 kilometres (4,760 miles) of high-pressure pipe and 618 above-ground installations.
- As Great Britain's System Operator (SO) we make sure gas and electricity is transported safely and efficiently from where it is produced to where it is consumed. From April 2019, Electricity System Operator (ESO) is a new standalone business within National Grid, legally separate from all other parts of the National Grid Group. This will provide the right environment to deliver a balanced and impartial ESO that can realise real benefits for consumers as we transition to a more decentralised, decarbonised electricity system.
- Other UK activities mainly relate to businesses operating in competitive markets outside of our core regulated businesses; including interconnectors, gas metering activities and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) importation terminal – all of which are now part of National Grid Ventures. National Grid Property is responsible for the management, clean-up and disposal of surplus sites in the UK. Most of these are former gas works.

Find out more about the energy challenge and how National Grid is helping find solutions to some of the challenges we face at <https://www.nationalgrid.com/group/news>

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