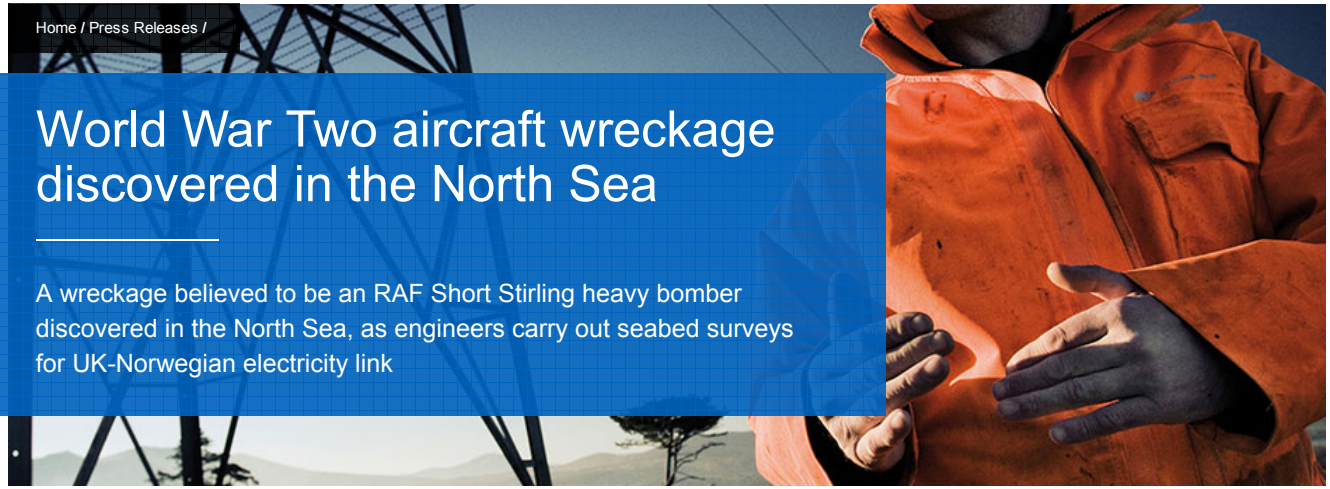

World War Two aircraft wreckage discovered in the North Sea

A wreckage believed to be an RAF Short Stirling heavy bomber discovered in the North Sea, as engineers carry out seabed surveys for UK-Norwegian electricity link

29 Aug 2017

• RAF Short Stirlings were used to transport essential supplies to Norwegian resistance fighters during WW2

• North Sea Link will be the world's longest sub-sea interconnector when it becomes operational in 2021. The 720km cable will run between Northumberland in the UK and Suldal in Norway

A wreck believed to be a British World War Two aircraft that carried supplies to the Norwegian resistance has been discovered by engineers carrying out sea-bed surveys in the North Sea.

The discovery was made by specialist engineers working on the North Sea Link interconnector; a joint project being developed by National Grid and the Norwegian electricity transmission owner and operator, Statnett, which will link the two countries via a sub-sea power cable, enabling them to trade electricity.

Experts consulted by the North Sea Link project team have identified the wreck as an RAF Short Stirling heavy bomber, which played a major role in delivering supplies from Britain to Norwegian resistance fighters throughout the war.

Bengt Stangvik, a second world war aviation enthusiast, was brought on board by the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) to investigate the find in more detail.

According to Stangvik, the Short Stirling was the Royal Air Force's first four-engine heavy bomber of the Second World War, but encountered problems reaching over 15,000 feet when fully loaded.

Stangvik said: "This meant that on combined operations with other RAF bombers that could fly higher, Luftwaffe nightfighters that were sent up to stop them, concentrated on the Stirlings.

"Several Stirlings disappeared without a trace on missions to Norway in winter 1944-45. Based on the location of this wreck, it is probable that it was on a mission to drop supplies to the resistance forces in western Norway."

Stangvik revealed 30 British aircraft went missing in total as part of the Norwegian resistance, 19 of which were Short Stirlings. He believes this discovery is most likely one of the six Short Stirlings that are unaccounted for.

Although the wreckage does not fall under the protection of the Norwegian Cultural Heritage Act, it is covered by the UK's Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

National Grid contacted the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) within the UK's Ministry of Defence (MOD) to notify them of this find. One of JCCC's responsibilities is to co-ordinate investigations following the discovery of human remains of British service personnel killed in World War I and World War II.

JCCC team member, Sue Raftree, acknowledged the potential discovery but could not confirm it definitively.

Sue said: "Discoveries at sea are relatively rare due to their very location. A number of aircraft are known to have been lost in the North Sea during the course of the Second World War but we need positive evidence before we can confirm.

"We would class this aircraft as a war grave. It is protected under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 which covers crashed military aircraft in both UK territorial and international waters.

"There are many brave service personnel who have no known grave and who gave their lives fighting for their country."

Nigel Williams, North Sea Link project director for National Grid, said: "Carrying out detailed surveys of the sea-bed are absolutely critical during the construction of a new interconnector. We need to know exactly what the sea-bed looks like along the proposed cable route corridor, before making any final decisions about where the cable can be laid.

"We use advanced sonar equipment to scan the sea-bed, at depths that range between 100 and 600 metres. Any objects or structures that are detected are marked as target points. If we feel they need closer inspection, we can send down a remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) or a 'drop cam' so they can tell us more about what we are looking at."

Nigel continued: "When images of what appeared to be an aircraft wheel came through, you can imagine our surprise. It was only when experts investigated the images in more detail that we learnt there was a strong possibility it could be a British aircraft that served during World War Two."

"Sadly, it appears the pilot and the crew of this particular aircraft were never able to complete their mission."

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- 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.
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