

'THE SOUND OF SILENCE'

Poignant memory of Llandow air disaster

REPORT by TIM CHAPMAN

"THE sound of the plane woke me up – it was no different to normal – I looked out of the window and it was on the ground, and there was just silence."

That is how Mrs Lydia Davies remembers the Llandow air disaster which occurred 60 years ago and claimed the lives of 75 Welsh rugby supporters returning from Ireland, along with five of the crew.

At the time, Lydia was a young woman of 20, who lived with her parents Evan and Olwen, sister Betty and brother Bryn at Park Farm, Sigingstone.

The farm was just 100 yards from where the Avro Tudor V aircraft crashed as it headed for Llandow Aerodrome – there were only three survivors. Two stumbled to the farm.

Lydia, who lives in nearby Llanblethian today, recalled the strange silence on that Sunday afternoon, March 12, 1950 as she looked across at the plane's wreckage.

"I used to go to sleep on Sunday afternoons

before I'd go to milk the cows.

"The sound of the plane woke me up – it was no different to normal – I looked out of the window and it was on the ground, and there was just silence. It was so quiet.

"Two of the survivors came clambering over the garden hedge. They didn't have shoes on and got caught on the thorns.

"My mum and dad ran out to greet them. My mother bathed their wounds and we made them a cup of tea – fortunately, they weren't in too bad a way.

"One of them was a teacher, and we met them both again a few months later when an outdoor memorial service was held at Sigingstone.

"At the time, it was the world's worst aviation disaster.

"My sister Betty was a Sunday School teacher in Llysworney and while cycling back through the country lanes, a man told her, 'You don't know what you are going to see along there', and it really unnerved her.

"I didn't go to the site of the crash on that day, but on the following day we ferried cups of tea to

RIGHT:
Mrs Lydia Davies vividly remembers the events surrounding the Llandow air disaster to this day.

the people who were working there.

"On the day of the crash, I do remember that the emergency services were up from St Athan in no time."

One treasured memento that Lydia has held onto is a letter of thanks that one of the survivors wrote to her parents just four weeks after the event.

It reads:

April 10, 1950

Dear Mr Thomas and family,

I should like to thank you on behalf of my brother-in-law and myself for the extreme kindness you showed to us on the afternoon of the terrible air crash which occurred near your farm.

You will no doubt be



interested to learn that we are both on the road to recovery and I hope to resume my school duties after the Easter holidays.

Thank you for your kindness and concern.

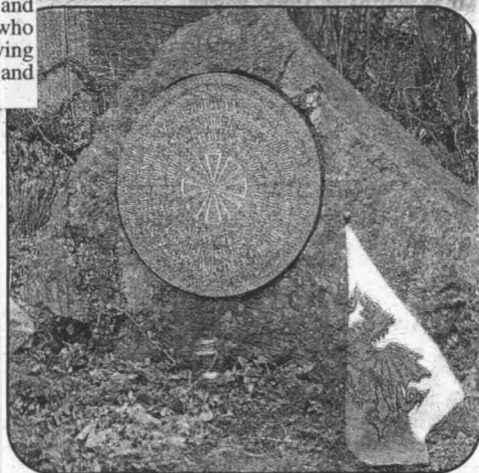
Yours faithfully,

D Gwynne Anthony.

The three survivors were Mr Anthony, Mr Handel Rogers of the Welsh Rugby Union, and Mr Meville Thomas, who at 85, is the only living survivor of the crash and lives in Llanharan.

Memories of air disaster

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ABOVE:

The memorial at Sigingstone to the 80 people who died on March 12, 1950.

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The aircraft had approached the aerodrome at low altitude, rose steeply, stalled, and then crashed into the field yards from the farm. There was no explosion.

Lydia added: "As a thank you for what my parents did that day, the survivors sent my mother and father international tickets every year."

Conservative regional Assembly Member Andrew RT Davies, who lives not far from the crash site, said:

"The Vale is now home to many aviation establishments, both at Cardiff Airport, and in St Athan. This disaster led to many safety

improvements, which helped to safeguard the future of air travel.

"It is important that this event is not forgotten and that measures are taken to ensure that tragedies like this are never repeated."

As thousands of Welsh rugby fans made their way across to Dublin for the Ireland v Wales international last weekend, many of them will have spared a thought, on the 60th anniversary of the disaster, for those that lost their lives.

A memorial stone stands in the hamlet of Sigingstone to ensure that events of March 12, 1950 are never forgotten.

13 March 1950

Eighty killed in air disaster

Eighty persons were killed when an Avro Tudor V air-liner on a charter flight from Dublin to Cardiff crashed yesterday afternoon near the village of Sigingstone, about four miles from Cowbridge (Glamorgan).

The plane carried 78 passengers, who were returning from the international Rugby match between Ireland and Wales at Belfast on Saturday, and a crew of five. Four escaped alive from the plane. Two were only slightly injured, but one died later.

One report says that the plane nose-dived into a field, broke in two, and disintegrated. There was no fire or explosion.

Air Vice-Marshal Donald Bennett, head of Fairflight, Ltd., owners of the Tudor, flew to the scene to make a personal investigation of the disaster, which is the greatest in the history of civil aviation.

The Welsh disaster [leader]

Measured by the scale of the death-roll alone, the air disaster in south Wales is quite the most shocking catastrophe that civil aviation has endured. In these days of world flights and the regular service of transcontinental and transoceanic airlines there is a special poignancy in the crash

which comes on our doorstep and a bewildering sense of disproportion between the brief journey on which its victims were embarked and the complete disaster in which it has ended. Even in the rapid development of passenger flight in America, where first-class travel by air is already as much a commonplace as going by train, there has been no loss of life on anything approaching this scale in any one air crash. Yet the flight from Dublin to Glamorganshire is of less than an hour's duration - about the length of an extended "pleasure flight" - and not too easily associated in the mind with ideas of danger and destruction. The passengers who came down at Sigingstone yesterday were representative of a great number of Welshmen

whose interest had centred on Belfast on Saturday. Their sad fate comes with cruel instancy on the heels of a national triumph in which there was wide rejoicing. The sympathy with those who have lost kin or friends will be as nation-wide as the shock with which the news has been received, and will be deeply felt far beyond the borders of Wales. Of how the accident occurred, its causes and responsibilities, discussion must wait upon investigation. There must be grave fears that much vital evidence will have been destroyed with the 'plane, its passengers, and crew; but the story must be sifted as best it can to ensure so far as is humanly possible against the repetition of disaster and to restore confidence in civil flight.

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