

Dornier bomber recovery in pictures: Only surviving German World War II Dornier plane raised from sea

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Dornier bomber pulled from the sea

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The only surviving Second World War Dornier bomber was lifted from its watery grave in the English Channel yesterday.

The rare German aeroplane was shot down off the Kent coast over 70 years ago during the Battle of Britain and the project is believed to be the biggest recovery of its kind in British waters.

Attempts to raise the relic over the last few weeks have been hit by strong winds but the operation was finally successful.

Divers working for the RAF Museum in London had been frustrated at being kept waiting by the weather.

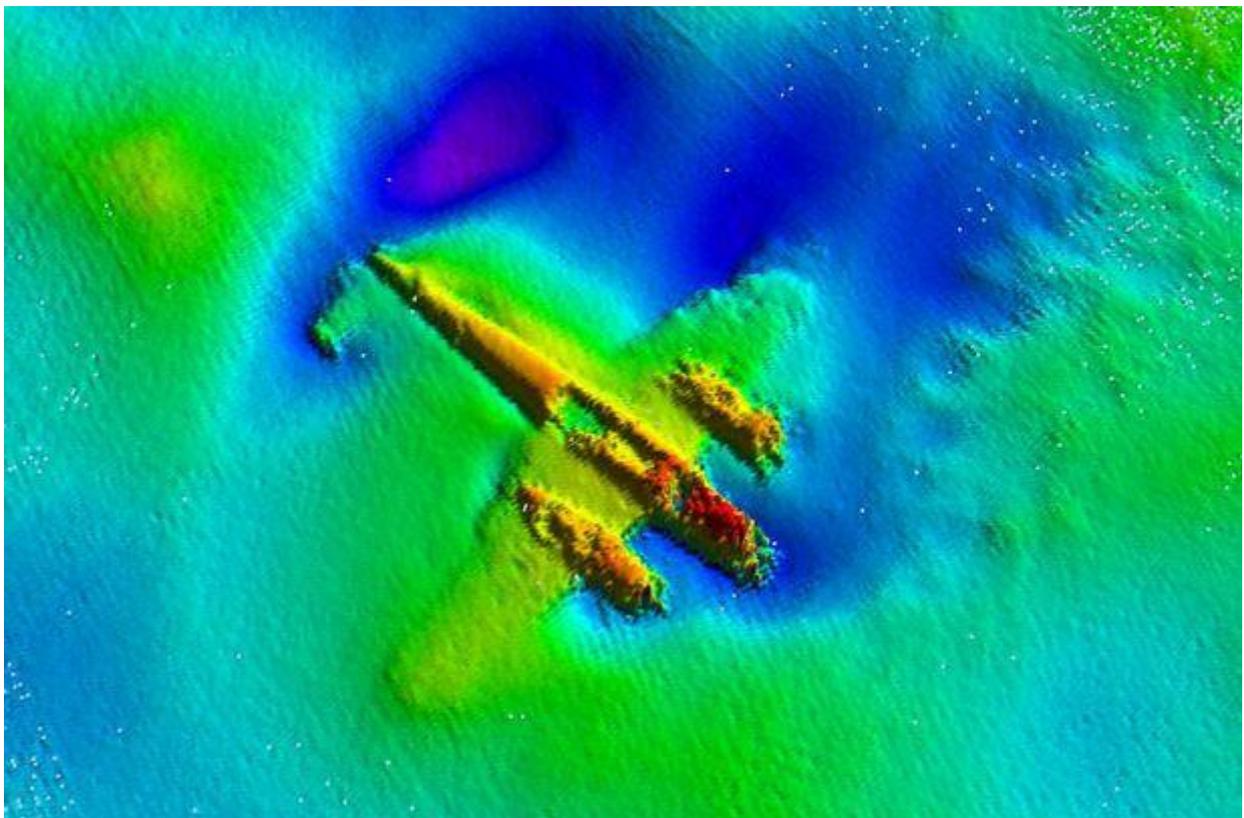
But they were able to hoist the historic bomber from the seabed after placing metal cables round the fuselage.

The plane was raised onto a barge and then being brought ashore at Ramsgate Harbour, Kent.

Bad weather has delayed the operation for three weeks and on at least four occasions their barge had to shelter in the harbour.

But project managers, who have been limited to a £500,000 budget, were delighted last night.

One said: "After days of uncertainty, it is terrific to think we have finally recovered this historic plane from the sea."



It's there: The wreck site

Port Of London Authority

Historians at the RAF Museum have been planning the project since 2008 when the plane was spotted lying 50ft below the surface of the sea.

They aim to restore it to his original condition and put it on show to the public in two years' time.

The museum's head of collections, Ian Thirsk, said: "We are having to rely to a larger degree than we originally planned on the structural integrity of the aircraft, but we have no choice.

"We are doing what we can to save a unique and precious heritage asset. If we leave it one thing is certain -- it won't be there in a year's time."

A museum spokesman added: "It has been lifted and is now safely on the barge and in one piece.

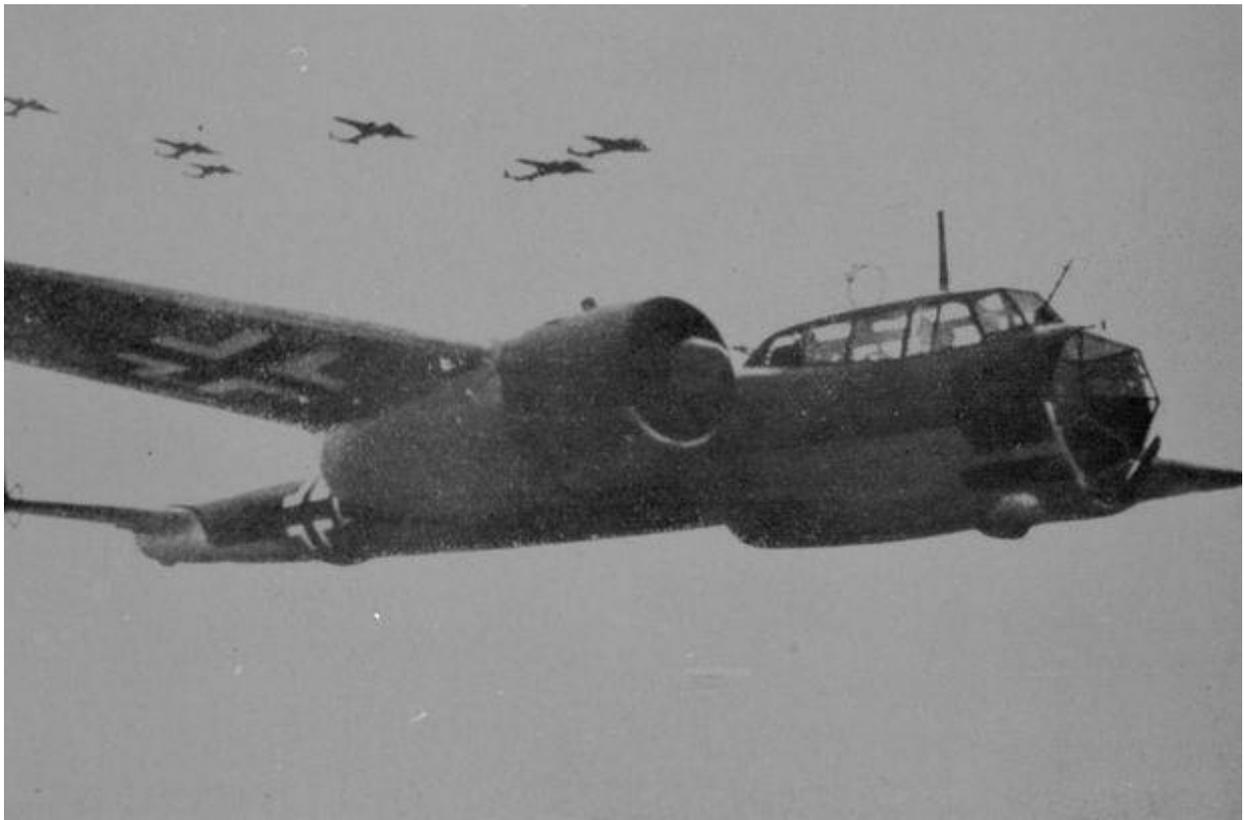
"The operation has been an absolute success, the aircraft looks great and I believe it will be towed into port tomorrow morning."

Aircraft historian Chris Goss last month called the discovery a "fantastic" find.

He said: "This aircraft is going to be the only one of its type in existence in the world.

"This aircraft is complete and therefore its price from a historical viewpoint is invaluable."

Dornier factfile



A large formation of Dornier Do 17Z bombers in flight

RAF Museum

The Dornier 17Z was designed as a light, fast bomber and was produced between 1934 and 1940 for the Luftwaffe.

More than 1,700 of the Dornier 17Z models and its variants were manufactured and the twin-engined aircraft became one of Germany's main front-line bombers up to 1941.

The plane had a 60-foot wingspan, typically carried three 7.92mm machine guns, a 1,100lb bomb payload and could cruise at speeds in excess of 220mph.

The Dornier 17Z was much-liked by pilots because of its manoeuvrability and easy handling particularly at low altitudes.

Its thin fuselage - which earned it the nickname "flying pencil" - also made it a difficult target for Allied fighters.

Nevertheless a total of 171 of them were lost during the Battle of Britain with 54 shot down in August 1940 alone.

Eventually its short range of 400 miles and comparatively low payload saw it superseded by the superior and more powerful Junker JU 88.

Few Dornier 17Zs survived the war as they were scrapped for their valuable aluminium frames.

The last working model was scrapped by the Finnish Air Force in 1952.