

LN-PABS last flight.

Told by Jan Antonsen, mechanic at LN-PAB.

After landing in Bodø a new assignment was given to the pilots on LN-PAB, Knut Karlsen and Trygve Rydland. I was told nothing, and I did not ask either! Three passengers came on board. They said nothing – no greetings or presentation. We took off from Bodø and flew to Narvik where we stayed overnight. I had to share room with the three passengers, due to lack of available rooms at the pension. The passengers still did not say anything despite their heavy drinking during the evening. The only evidence of their identity was a label on one of their rucksacks, it said "Munich". I knew that the Americans had a training center for spies in Munich. Could our passengers be spies? But where did they come from? I concluded that they looked like Fins, and I felt more comfortable coming to this conclusion.

The next morning, the 2nd of September, we took off from Narvik and flew further north. We finally landed on a lake at the tundra, close to a road, but I did not know where this was, and I did not ask. The three passengers disembarked. From here we flew to Kirkenes where we stayed overnight. The mayor of Sør-Varanger had some bedsits and gave us shelter.

The next day, the 3rd of September we flew to Vadsø where we picked up a passenger, a Norwegian army lieutenant. We then flew to Alta, where all passenger seats in the aircraft were taken out except for a seat for the lieutenant. We also took onboard some equipment, stored in boxes. The content of the boxes is unknown to me. We took off again, this time heading east for the inland plateau. We came to a large lake (I have later experienced that it was Gavnevatn.) There we could see some people and a tent near the shore. The pilots made a turn to check out the landing conditions and set the plane up for a landing. It was in the afternoon with a low sun. The pilots maybe were dazzled for a while and came a bit out of course. The 2nd pilot (Rydland) suddenly shouts "Knut, land ahead", and at the same moment we hit the edge of the waterfront. The plane made a nose over, going around in the air and hit the ground upside down. I had no seat. I just sat on some boxes, and was not secured to anything. I ended up back in the plane together with all the boxes and the lieutenant, who was still sitting in the chair that was broken loose from its mountings.

Now there were lots of clutter and confusion in the plane. We were upside down and it therefore was difficult to orientate. The lieutenant came free from the chair. We both smelled the gasoline. We had to get out! I made a hole in a window. It turned out to be the window of the door. The door could be opened and the two of us got out in a hurry. The pilots were already out. The plane thankfully did not catch fire. We had some small scratches here and there, but no serious injuries. The people we previously had seen on the beach at the other side of the lake had witnessed the crash. Two of these came around the lake by foot, reaching us after about an hour's walking.

About the plane: One float was broken, the other one was ok. The undamaged float

contained some emergency equipment like an inflatable dingy with accessories and some other useful equipment. We pulled out the emergency equipment, the dingy was inflated and we started paddling across the lake, to meet the people in the camp. The two guys who walked around the lake, the lieutenant, the two pilots and I - 6 men in all in the little dinghy - It went well! Two - three men welcomed us at the beach. One of them I could identify as Tore Snefjellå, known from the Norwegian resistance during WW 2. We stayed in their tent until we at last were picked up after a particularly cold and bleak night.

The next day a Catalina landed on the lake. The pilot turned out to be the legendary Catalina pilot Major Anonsen. The dingy was handed over to the people in the camp. They loaded it with the cargo we had brought with us. Later they paddled along the lake, and we saw them no more. The Catalina landed at Skattøra, close to Tromsø. We were happy having survived the dramatic landing without severe injuries and loss of lives. The pilots and I went by SAS to Harstad and further by bus to Narvik. This was the story about LH-PAB and its last mission.

One year later:

In the summer of 1953 I was still working for Widerøe in Narvik. Chief pilot Kaare Friis Baastad, I and two assistants from Narvik flew up to Gavnevaan with Norseman LN-PAE. Here we disassembled the propeller and the engine from LN-PAB. The operation went smooth. Baastad took a shortcut back to Narvik, and we probably illegally crossed Swedish territory by Torneträsk. The engine and some smaller parts were shipped to Oslo by train.

In 1994, I returned to Gavnevaan where the wreck of LN-PAB still was laying. I could see that people had used it as shelter when camping at the waterfront. The reason for my being there was that the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation was going to make an interview about our mission and the accident. The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation would ensure authentic materials from the events back in 1952, as a part of a program about the Cold War events. I do not know if the recording ever was sent.

PS!

"In the autumn of 1952 I (Jan Antonsen) heard on the radio that inside the Soviet Union some spies had been caught. They claimed they had been flown close to the border of Norway / Finland with Norwegian light aircrafts. From there they had walked across Finnish territory and crossed the border between Finland and the Soviet Union, all the way by foot. Norway disavowed the Russian words! "