

General Władysław Sikorski and the B-24

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Thirty years of self-funded investigations into the failed Rudolf Hess peace flight have taken John Harris and Richard Wilbourn close to British secrets that were beyond the ken of Stalin, Hitler, Roosevelt and quite possibly unknown to Churchill.

The astounding events of 10 May 1941, when Hitler's deputy crashed a fighter-bomber in Southern Scotland just six weeks before the German invasion of Russia, followed twelve months of dangerous and duplicitous secret wartime diplomacy.

The new angle from Harris and Wilbourn¹ concerns a risky transatlantic flight by the prime minister of the Polish government in exile. General Władysław Sikorski was also the commander-in-chief of a worldwide force of 40,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors.

His Polish army included 17,000 men based in Scotland, a force of experienced and fiercely-motivated soldiers theoretically capable of overwhelming any other British unit north of the border in the desperate days of 1941.

Also housed in Scotland were some anti-Sikorski political opponents, a number of whom had been shipped to a detention camp at Rothesay on the Isle of Bute where they were held with Polish Jews, 'drunks, homosexuals and others of whom Sikorski and his associates disapproved.'² General Sikorski even interned Isaac Deutscher (the Polish Marxist biographer of Leon Trotsky) at Rothesay. Deutscher was held as a detained soldier in the Rothesay camp between 1940 and 1942, until released to join the staff of *The Economist* as their expert on military and Soviet affairs.³

By finding the unusual surname Borenus in an old Wiltshire telephone book, Harris and Wilbourn were able to speak to a direct family descendant of Tancred Borenus, who had been the fine art adviser to Queen Mary, the widow of King George V. Early in January 1941 a devious

¹ John Harris and Richard Wilbourn, *Rudolf Hess: Truth at Last*, (London: Uniform, 2019) p. 127.

² *Jewish Chronicle*, London, 15 January 2016:
<<https://www.thejc.com/life-inside-the-concentration-camps-of-scotland-1.57427>>

³ Tamara Deutscher, preface to the *Non-Jewish Jew And Other Essays*, (London: Verso, 2017).

assistant chief of MI6 had released a large amount of hard currency to persuade Tancred Borenus to take a flight to neutral Portugal. From there he took a dangerous journey using his Finnish passport across Vichy France (carrying a suicide pill in his bag) to get to a meeting with Carl Burckhardt of the International Red Cross in Geneva.

Claude Dansey, that assistant chief of MI6, founder of its shady pre-war Z Organisation, has been described by the historian Hugh Trevor Roper as 'an utter shit; corrupt, incompetent, but with a certain low cunning'.⁴ The Dansey/Borenus mission compromised Burckhardt. Due to an unexpected release of documents after the war, the Swiss humanitarian was forced to deny there had been any political motive in his later meeting with Rudolf Hess's duplicitous messenger, Albrecht Haushofer.

Harris and Wilbourn have discovered that Borenus was back in London from his dangerous mission to chair a meeting of the Polish Relief Fund on 31 March. By then he had also lunched at least twice at the Dorchester with General Sikorski and his influential British liaison officer Colonel Victor Cazalet, Conservative MP for Chippenham.

A new timeline reveals that on Saturday, 10 May 1941, on the night of the heaviest-ever German bombing raid on London, Hess and Sikorski were both making dangerous flights to Scotland.

Victor Cazalet, working in the USA with Sikorski, warned Churchill by cable on 30 April: 'Sikorski getting agitated about getting home. I can't help him. The planes are not ready.' Cazalet cabled again on 1 May: 'The General has not gone yet, he is getting very irritable, poor man.'

Sikorski eventually flew back to Britain – without Cazalet but accompanied by the mysterious Polish diplomat Józef Retinger – and had two Sikorski 'planes' at his disposal for the journey. The one he took had tail number AM916 and was a new Mark I B-24 Liberator bomber, unarmed, not fitted with self-sealing fuel tanks and very tricky to fly for unfamiliar pilots. The other was a heavily-armed B-17 Flying Fortress, tail number AN537, that took off from Gander, in Newfoundland, just ten minutes after Sikorski's B-24 – at 22:17 local time on 10 May 1941.⁵

By the time Sikorski and Retinger landed at Prestwick after a 10-hour transatlantic flight, Rudolf Hess, or Hauptmann Alfred Horn as he was calling himself, had crashed his Messerschmitt Bf110 at Eaglesham near Glasgow.

⁴ Michael Korda, *Daily Beast*, 19 November 2011: <<https://tinyurl.com/u79uxd5>> or <<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-real-james-bond-ian-flemings-commandos-reviewed>>.

⁵ Exactly three months later their B-24 pilot, Captain Ernest Robert Bristow White of BOAC, would be killed flying another new B-24. AM261 crashed on Mullach Buidhe, north of Goat Fell on the Isle of Arran, killing Captain White and 21 ferry aircrew on their way back to Gander.

For some inexplicable reason, the first man in Scotland to talk to the pilot in German was a Polish diplomat. Harris and Wilbourn write:

'Roman Battaglia, the Polish consular official, was first on the scene in the Scout Hall at Giffnock near Glasgow, interviewing Hess and translating questions for nearly two hours on 11 May before Hess was taken away to Maryhill Barracks. . . .

We were not alone in questioning this turn of events, and indeed we were interested to learn that MI5 had inquired how it was possible that Battaglia had turned up and got so close to Hess. Over the years we have tried to learn more about Battaglia, and the more we have learned the odder things become

So in the immediate aftermath of the Hess landing we have:

- Battaglia making his way to Giffnock and conducting an impromptu interview with Hess
- The leader of the Polish nation landing at Prestwick the following morning and then quickly disappearing for the following week
- The log book for 309 RAF/Polish Squadron at Renfrew not being currently available
- The attempt on Hess's life being planned by seventeen Polish officers and two British persons while Hess is at Buchanan Castle.⁶

Harris and Wilbourn now reckon that Hess was attempting an anti-Churchill regime change in Britain: either by the use of King George VI's royal prerogative to make peace with a German *parlementar*, or by an encounter with the Polish government-in-exile in Scotland. Sikorski's companion on the B-24, Józef Retinger, had used the same kind of unorthodox secret diplomacy in 1915 and 1916 when he attempted to broker a separate peace between Britain and Austria-Hungary

Retinger's unorthodox diplomacy in 1916 has been described by his biographer M.B.B. Biskupski:

'The hosts were not informed in advance of his arrival or the purpose of his mission. Retinger described himself as acting on behalf of the highest circles of the British government and claimed to be involved in political reconnaissance.'⁷

Research into the cryptic notation on surviving Hess flight maps suggests to Harris and Wilbourn that the Bf110 was vectored across the North Sea for a controlled landing at RAF Dundonald, and most certainly not a landing on the Duke of Hamilton's primitive personal airstrip at Dungavel House, as suggested by the British government.

⁶ See note 1, p. 193.

⁷ M.B.B. Biskupski, *War and Diplomacy in East and West: A Biography of Józef Retinger*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), chapter 2.

'Once Hess had crashed at Eaglesham the game was over. The actual peace treaty [rather than any later interpretations] was duly fished out of the hedge at Floors Farm on the Sunday morning. [Hardly evidence of a pre-planned parachute jump.] Needless to say, it has never been seen since.

It is very simple: once Hess was under Churchillian control he knew he had failed and so tried to negotiate as best he could with his unintended captors, already knowing there to be little or no prospect of success. These negotiations seem to have been construed in later years as being the rationale for the flight itself, and whole books have been written on that basis, whereas the reality is that once the plane had crashed so had any prospect of peace. The Second World War had descended into a bitter and bloody battle to the end during the late Scottish evening of 10 May 1941.'⁸

Six weeks later, on June 22, the war descended into Operation Barbarossa, the largest invasion in the history of warfare. The why and the wherefore of the Sikorski flight and the Hess crash landing were closed books by December, when the Barbarossa force of three million men was turned back in the snow at Khimki, 19 kilometres from the centre of Moscow.

It was to be a later Sikorski night flight, a B-24 taking off from Gibraltar at 23:07 on 4 July 1943, that proved catastrophic for Poland and became a permanent agony for Winston Churchill.⁹ This time Sikorski was killed along with Victor Cazalet and an 'estimated fourteen' passengers and crew when RAF Transport Command Liberator AL523 crashed into the sea just 16 seconds after take-off.

Woken in London during the night, the Polish foreign minister Edward Raczynski wrote in his diary:

'This catastrophe, coming at a turning-point in the war, when the Big Three meeting is apparently at hand, and when vital decisions require to be taken in consultation with us – is a bewildering visitation of Providence; so much so, that Poles everywhere

⁸ See note 1, p. 207.

⁹ Churchill's despair at the news of Sikorski's death was recorded by Frank Roberts of the FO and by Retinger, whose place on the B-24 had been taken by Sikorski's daughter. In his memoirs, Retinger wrote: 'I was ushered into the big room at 10 Downing Street which had just been vacated by the Cabinet, and which was dense with smoke. I found the Prime Minister alone, wearing his light blue siren suit. As soon as he saw me he got up and started to cry. He told me that he had loved General Sikorski as a younger brother, and had watched his career not only with interest, but with affection. He was profoundly moved and shocked by the news of the crash, and deplored the fact that he would not be able to cooperate with General Sikorski when peace came. He went on to recall with emotion the many critical days they had spent together.' John Pomian (ed.), *JOSEPH RETINGER: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise*, (Sussex University Press, 1972) p. 144.

suspect the hand, not of Providence, but of a felonious enemy.’¹⁰

The Czech pilot of the B-24, RAF Flight Lieutenant Eduard Prchal, was the only survivor. The body of Sikorski’s daughter, Zofia Wanda Leśniowska (who was also his cypher clerk and interpreter) was never found.

At least five passengers had been packed in the bomb bay with six more in the fuselage of the Liberator along with cargo from Cairo and Gibraltar bound for London. Two weeks after the crash, the Governor of Gibraltar General Sir [Frank] Noel Mason-Macfarlane wrote:

‘He took off easily with at least five hundred yards in hand. In fact by the time he was over the eastern end of the runway he had reached a height of at least 2-300 feet.’¹¹

According to the historian Nicholas Rankin, Mason-Macfarlane had expected Prchal to ‘put his plane’s nose down first to gather speed before he climbed to cruising height, and they watched his navigation lights do that as usual.’

‘We waited a moment expecting to see the lights start to rise again. But they never did! In fact, the aircraft flew on a level keel and apparently in perfect shape straight into the sea at an angle of ten degrees and hit the water with a sickening crash about three-quarters-of-a-mile from the shore. A split second before she hit the water the pilot cut out his engines which had apparently been running perfectly.’¹²

This happened just as Stalin and Roosevelt were forcing Churchill to accept that winning the war was more important than the original 1939 *casus belli* of saving Poland from Nazi Germany. The Gibraltar B-24 crash was immediately blamed on a conspiracy.¹³

¹⁰ *Krakow Post*, 4 August 2008: <<http://www.krakowpost.com/1129/2008/08>>.

¹¹ Nicholas Rankin, *Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler* (London: Faber, 2017) p. 432. See <<https://tinyurl.com/wa4q5hw>>.

¹² Rankin, see note 11, pp. 432-3.

¹³ <<https://tinyurl.com/v2j3oon>> or <<http://www.storiainrete.com/1079/enigmi/was-general-sikorski-a-victim-of-the-katyn-massacre/>>

Professor Jacek Tebinka of Gdansk University drew a Polish historian’s conclusion in 2013.

‘The assassination theory was made up by Germany to drive a wedge between the Poles and their Western Allies. Goebbels’s propaganda claimed that the Soviets killed Sikorski with the approval of the British, because he dared to denounce the Katyn massacre and turned to the Red Cross for help. [The Nazis] treated the general’s death as an opportunity to extend the Katyn propaganda launched by them in April 1943 . . . It was widely believed in Arab countries. In the summer of 1943, Polish diplomats and the British were horrified by just how popular in Cairo was the theory that London was behind the death of Sikorski.’

Gazeta Wyborcza, daily newspaper, Warsaw, 28 June 2013, quoted in Nicholas Rankin, (see note 10) p. 437.

The many suspects included both Churchill and Stalin, along with the Nazi Germans and the many Polish opponents of Sikorski's policy of co-operating with Stalin despite the NKVD murder of 22,000 Polish officers and 'intelligentsia' in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk.

Even the surviving Czech pilot fell under suspicion. Lt Ludwik Lubienski, chief of the Polish military mission in Gibraltar, said Prchal was pulled from the water wearing a bulky Mae West lifejacket. Lubienski claimed he personally unfastened the lifejacket before Prchal was taken to hospital. But Prchal, a former Battle of Britain Hurricane pilot, said he had never worn a lifejacket flying Liberators. For the rest of his life, at several court hearings and in many searching interviews, he swore his lifejacket had been hanging behind his cramped cockpit seat when the aircraft controls jammed.

The 1943 RAF inquiry concluded that 'it is also clear that the captain of the aircraft who is a pilot of great experience and exceptional ability was in no way to blame' was never accepted by Lubienski¹⁴ or the Polish government. Lubienski found it suspicious that Prchal and his co-pilot had held their Liberator, with all four engines running, for twenty minutes at the western end of the runway.

Earlier that day a Soviet B-24 Liberator, taking Stalin's outstanding London ambassador Ivan Maisky to Moscow, had been parked alongside Sikorski's unguarded B-24. Maisky, a man admired by Churchill and later jailed by Stalin, had once signed a treaty with Sikorski and much later was able to declare on his honour that he had no knowledge of any Soviet attempt to kill the general. Both aircraft were parked close to a high wire fence which marked the frontier with neutral Spain and they were under observation by German agents in a hut on the Spanish side of the fence. The future Soviet double agent Kim Philby had also recently been in Gibraltar, serving as British counter-intelligence chief in Iberia.

The simultaneous presence of Maisky and Sikorski in Gibraltar proved tricky for Mason-Macfarlane.¹⁵ He had negotiated in Moscow in 1942 to persuade Stalin to release from the Gulag 25,000 survivors of the Polish soldiers captured by the Red Army in the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland. Stalin eventually allowed a Polish general, Władysław Anders, to leave the Lubyanka Prison and lead this fearsome army across the Iranian border

¹⁴ Lubienski's daughter, the British actress Rula Lenska, said in an interview, 'I've got a feeling that my daddy was buried keeping a big secret in his heart.' Bzowska Katarzyna, 'Jedna noc w Gibraltarze' (English: *One night in Gibraltar*), *Nowy Dziennik*, (Polish Daily News) New York, July 4-6, 2003, pp. 42-43.

¹⁵ As British military attaché in Berlin on Hitler's 50th birthday, 20 April 1939, the Scottish Colonel Noel Mason-Macfarlane had offered to assassinate Hitler. See Roger Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler* (London: Random House, 2007). The historian Donald Cameron Watt described Mason-MacFarlane as a 'courageous eccentric'. See his *How War Came*, (London: Heinemann, 1989) p. 183. Mason-MacFarlane was Labour MP for Paddington North between 1945 and 1946.

and into the North African Desert as part of Churchill's Eighth Army.

'Mason-Mac' managed to keep Maisky apart from the Sikorski entourage during that morning on The Rock. Stalin had just broken off diplomatic relations with Sikorski's government, after Sikorski's swift request for a Red Cross investigation into the April 1943 German discovery of the bodies of the murdered Polish officers in the Katyn Forest.



Sikorski inspected fortifications at Gibraltar on an earlier visit to the Rock, guided by the Scottish general Noel Mason-Macfarlane [left]. Behind Sikorski are the 'ever-mysterious' Józef Retinger, post-war co-founder of Bilderberg, and the British liaison officer Colonel Victor Cazalet MP who died with Sikorski in the 1943 crash.

In 1967, the literary manager of the National Theatre in London, Kenneth Tynan, and its founder Laurence Olivier, were forced to cancel the premiere of a play implying that Churchill ordered the murder of Sikorski. The German playwright Rolf Hochhuth had based his *Soldiers: An Obituary for Geneva* on nothing more than a conversation with the English-born wife of his German publisher and some research by the right-wing author David Irving.¹⁶

Ken Tynan managed to get the play staged at the New Theatre in 1968 but disaster followed.¹⁷ Hochhuth was unaware that the Czech B-24 pilot was still alive in California and Captain Prchal sued all concerned.

¹⁶ David Irving, *Accident. The Death of General Sikorski* (London: William Kimber, 1967). This is available as a PDF on David Irving's website at <<http://www.fpp.co.uk/books/Accident/1967.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Richard Burton had been keen to play Churchill and co-direct the play with Tynan. But Burton was unaware that his wife Elizabeth Taylor was the god-daughter of Victor Cazalet who had died in the crash with Sikorski. 'Elizabeth Taylor told her husband that he would accept the leading role over her dead body. He turned it down . . .' *New York Magazine*, 29 April 1968.

The production had closed ignominiously long before Prchal won his case in the libel capital of the world, telling a London court in 1972:

'I received the green light from the tower and we began our take-off run. I pulled the stick back and the aircraft started to climb. When I was at 150ft I pushed the controls of the aircraft forward to gain speed. Suddenly I discovered I was not able to pull the stick back. The steering mechanism was jammed or locked.'¹⁸

The libel cost Tynan £20,000. The critic Hilary Spurling accused Tynan and Hochhuth of distorting Sikorski's real politics to make the 'intrinsically implausible case, that Churchill murdered Sikorski' for the illogical reason that Churchill had 'preferred to deal with Sikorski's infinitely more intransigent successors' over the location of the post-war Polish border.¹⁹

A year later, the British prime minister Harold Wilson asked Sir Robin Cooper, a former pilot working in the cabinet office, to review Air Marshal Sir John Slessor's 1943 inquiry. David Irving had noted the inquiry's alarming discovery that a mailbag from the cargo of AL523 had been found on the Gibraltar runway on the morning after the crash.

'Group Captain Bolland, the station commander, reappeared before the Court with the startling news that on July 5 a gunner on duty at the gunsite on the western end of the runway had picked up a mailbag which Bolland had now established had been part of the Liberator's freight. (Bolland has since stated that had the aircraft not crashed, the mailbag would have been placed on a later plane and the incident forgotten.) This incident was inexplicable: Bolland told the Court he was convinced that he would have noticed if the plane's rear hatch had not been properly closed on take-off, and Air Commodore Simpson, the A.O.C., echoed this view next day.

The gunner who had picked up the mailbag followed Bolland into the witness stand: he had seen the bag on the runway close to his site, which was four hundred yards from the western end of the runway.'²⁰

Sir Robin reported to Harold Wilson via the Cabinet Secretary:

'The possibility of Sikorski's murder by the British is excluded from this paper. The possibility of his murder by persons unknown cannot be so excluded. [. . .] But it still leaves open the question of what – or who – jammed them. No one has ever provided a

¹⁸ 'Pilot of General Sikorski's aircraft claims libel damages from German playwright.'
The Times, London, 3 May 1972.

¹⁹ Hilary Spurling, *The Spectator*, 20 December 1968.

²⁰ Irving, see note 16. It's on p. 107 of the PDF version Irving has available for free on his website.

satisfactory answer.²¹

Jan Bartelski, a former KLM airline captain, crash investigator and president of the International Federation of Air Line Pilots, surmised that the crash was accidentally caused by badly-stowed cargo, suggesting that the half-empty mail bag found on the runway had been blown out of the aircraft through an unfastened side hatch.²²

In 2008, the Polish president Lech Kaczynski, just two years before his own death in the deeply suspicious air crash at Smolensk,²³ supported the Warsaw Historical Society in a request to the Archbishop of Krakow for the tomb of Sikorski to be opened in the crypt of Wawel Castle. The Polish prime-minister Donald Tusk supported exhumation of the general and the Krakow Department of Forensic Medicine reported:

'The examinations demonstrated numerous fractures of the cranium, spine and extremities, the character of which corresponded to effects of an air crash. Based on corpse examination alone it was impossible to establish whether the air crash had been an effect of sabotage or an ill-fated accident. Although no typical evidence of intravitality was found, such as bruises or fat embolisms, yet the character of some fractures suggested that they had been incurred intravitality. These were represented by a spiral fracture of the femoral bone shaft, a fracture of the *sustentaculum tali* of the calcaneal bone and fractures of the transverse processes of the lumbar vertebrae.²⁴

Evidence that Sikorski's B-24 was unguarded on 4 July and parked with an open cargo door, just a few feet from a German observation post in neutral Spain, appeared in England in 2014.

Leading Aircraftsman Bill Walker, serving with 172 Squadron RAF Coastal Command, was billeted in a hut alongside Sikorski's B-24. From that position, he was able to examine the cargo of mailbags, loaded in Cairo and bound for London. Walker also ran his trained eye over the one-inch diameter control rods for the twin tail rudders and elevators of the Liberator. In an account, hand-written at his home in Hull on 22 June 2014, and transcribed by his son David Walker, the 92 years-old retired radio and radar technician and college lecturer described entering the unguarded B-24 in broad daylight on 4 July 1943:

²¹ Sir Robin Cooper, report to Sir Burke Trend (Cabinet Secretary) 24 January 1969.

²² Jan Bartelski, *Disasters in the Air: Mysterious Air Disasters Explained* (Crawley: Airline Publishing Limited, 2001) pp. 26–57.

²³ <<https://tinyurl.com/ycvsmcwe>> or <<https://news.sky.com/story/smolensk-crash-explosions-on-board-before-plane-hit-ground-investigator-says-11233792>>

²⁴ <<https://tinyurl.com/w9juuhl>> or <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44662964_Forensic_medical_examination_of_the_corpse_of_General_Wladyslaw_Sikorski_a_putative_victim_of_assassination_in_1943>

'The cargo-door was open, with no one around. Examination showed the internal space was roughly halved and had 2 floors. The cargo was on the top, with the sill at shoulder height. The floor across was corrugated metal and went as far as I could see forward and towards the tail unit. Wooden duck-boards ran down the middle. [. . . .]

Roughly 1.5 hours before the accident I left the NAAFI²⁵ about 9 pm local time. Crossing the airfield to go to my billet-hut, I noticed a crowd of uniformed people behind a 3-ton covered lorry. The lorry was tucked close to the fuselage of the Liberator with the tailgate down. Men within the lorry were bringing all sorts of boxes and crates to be transferred forward into the dark forward hold.

This loading concerned me as there was no aircrew or worthy ground-crew to supervise distribution and securing [of] the additional cargo. Are the boxes secured properly and not interfering with controls? Anything loose becomes "floating cargo" during a flight.

While watching I noticed under the port wing an open personnel-door to give access to the lower floor. [. . . .]

Seeing an RAF chap stood near the tail-plane, I went over to him and enquired "What's going on?" His reply was that the passengers have been here since 8 o'clock and the aircrew have not arrived yet. My next question was "Who is supervising the loading?" The answer was "They are.", but he didn't seem to be concerned.

As I left the scene, my thought was; I hope they know what they are doing.' ²⁶ [END]

Leading Aircraftsman Walker learned next day from the duty ground crew that passengers brought a lorry-load of suitcases and items purchased in Gibraltar and stowed them aboard the converted bomber – before any RAF aircrew had arrived.

Bill Walker offered a fresh theory to explain the uncanny period of twenty minutes when Captain Prchal kept his engines running under German observation, with his navigation lights burning brightly in the darkness, at the eastern end of the runway. Wartime long-distance flights took off by night from Gibraltar heading east over the Mediterranean, before turning behind the Rock of Gibraltar to block

²⁵ Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes, government-owned caterer to the armed forces.

²⁶ Some further background to Leading Aircraftsman Bill Walker's experience can be found at <<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/dww/sikorski/sikorski.html>>. His son's transcription of the memoir is in the PDF file at <<https://tinyurl.com/u33xd49>> or <<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/dww/sikorski/Walker-Sikorski-accident-account.pdf>>.

surveillance from the German observation hut near Bill's billet. He reckoned that the co-pilot (who died in the crash) might have spent twenty minutes when the engines were running at the western end of the runway investigating control stiffness in the fuselage of the Liberator. He surmised:

'The pilot was unhappy about the freedom of movement of the elevator. He asked the co-pilot to investigate in the cargo bay (which would be by feeling) in the darkness. The walkway would be clear. The first part would be OK as that had been loaded and secured in Africa.

It would be the lorry load of goods purchased in Gibraltar Town [that would be the problem]. There would also be overnight bags etc. The co-pilot would have a difficult, if nearly impossible job to trace clearance of the elevator control behind the heavy boxes.

The Cairo cargo was left on the plane overnight. Passengers arrived separate from a lorry-load of goods purchased in town. After a long wait for the aircrew, someone decided to transfer goods purchased from the lorry into the top cargo bay, which was open. I saw part of it; unauthorised people on the lorry and in the dark aircraft, pass goods and crates into the bay [to be] taken forward. I was concerned the cargo would not be distributed about the centre of gravity [and] also whether each item was secured properly to the formers and not laid in between them, or [whether cargo] had been fastened to the two control rods I saw the day before which had large universal couplings which were midway between the two formers. There would be others to allow for fuselage curvature. I did not see any wire cables used for the rudder and elevator trimmers.

The jamming of the elevators to lift the tail-unit made the aircraft do a downward loop into the sea. [It] was possible during the right-hand turn (starboard wing down a bit) for some piece of the unsupervised load to slip in between the widened gap between a former and a knuckle joint. When the aircraft hit the seabed, passengers and loose cargo would be thrown forward, including the obstruction, and [there] would not [be] any evidence as to what [had] happened.'²⁷

Below is Bill Walker's 2014 sketch map of the North Front airfield on 4 July 1943.²⁸

²⁷ See note 26.

²⁸ The drawing reproduced is Figure 1 in David Walker's transcription at <<https://tinyurl.com/u33xd49>> or <<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/dww/sikorski/Walker-Sikorski-accident-account.pdf>>.

