

THE BLOCH AIRCRAFT IN LAURAGAIS (1)

A famous crew man on board a forgotten aircraft

It all starts with a little box given by a friend, Christian. Inside, several aircraft parts, broken but in a pristine status (2). Christian explains to us the background : « these parts come from an aircraft that crashed at the beginning of world war II, in the Lauraguais area (this is east of Toulouse near Carcassonne) ; My stepfather, a young boy at that time, collected them on the ground. The wreck stayed on site quite a while and the kids were coming to play on it. He told me that the tubes inside the tires were yellow and very useful to make elastics for stone throwers. These parts stayed in that box in our garage for 70 years, thus their excellent conditions » (3)

THE PARTS

Their technical analysis confirms that we face aircraft parts : on one of them, you can read «Etablissements Labinal » (4) which was a famous French equipment supplier, still existing today. Our network of experts informs us that as per the "technical description and utilisation manual of the aircraft type Marcel Bloch Type 131 RB4 1939" the round part (5) from which electrical wires are attached is a component of the bombing system, one after the other (« the interval device » enabled the aircraft to drop bomb at a regular pace, with a predetermined time interval).

THE AIRCRAFT STORY

We are very lucky : on the lid of the box, the date is handwritten : 16 June 1940. The investigation can start and the aircraft is promptly identified. It was a Bloch 131 from the Francazal bombing instruction center . The story of this aircraft can be rebuilt, here it is :

In June 1940, the weather is awful in the South West of France. On June 18 only, three aircraft crash occur because of the poor weather. These were aircraft flying away from the German progression : one Latécoère 298 near Castres, another one near Montségur in the Pyrénées mountains and one Léo45 in the Ariège department in the South West of Toulouse. This later broke in flight due to the very strong turbulences, a wing was torn apart and the aircraft crashed killing the whole crew.

«our » Bloch 131 is practicing bombing training on 16 June 1940. Thanks to Christian who went investigating in the nearest village, interviewing people, we discover the report written at that time by the mayor of the village. We then understand better and here is the full story:

(Mayor's report) « Saturday 15 June 1940

At 4PM, I heard a weird noise, when I was in Enserny which was the crash of an aircraft near the field of Montcal, under the so called place la Jeanbernade ; aircraft upside down, 4 crew men, the gunner trapped under the wreck had to be unearthed and was dead, the pilot had a broken limb and a wound at his head, the two other crew men had broken legs and many bruises and wounds.

The engines have been torn away. It seems that the pilot made a mistake. This is what the Colonel coming from Francazal air base has stated together with a Commandant and a Captain. I organized the transfer of the crew to the hospital and one died there upon his arrival.

Weather cloudy, thunderstorm at 5H30 PM, rain : 10mm of water

Sunday 16 june 1940

The Commandant Saint Jours from Franczal Air Base came to document the death of the two crew members. One of them was the sous-lieutenant St Martin, député of the Gers department and the other was the sergent Père, from Saône et Loire Department ».

On site, there is a field but no part can be found there (6) However, Christian finds a very interesting document in the house of a farmer living nearby: a picture of the wreck. One can see how the airframe broke, and how the engines were torn away. However, the aircraft has not exploded, it is rather integre (7) which explains why two of the crew members survived. It is very likely that, while flying in bad weather, the pilot could not see the ground and collided in an almost horizontal flightplan.

ONE OF THE CREW MEMBERS WAS FAMOUS

We find the accident report written by the French Armée de l'Air (8) rédigé à l'époque mais surtout, nous découvrons que l'un des membres d'équipage était une personnalité politique connue : le sous-lieutenant Paul Saint Martin était (9) né le 4 Septembre 1901 à Simorre dans le Gers, il fut membre du parti socialiste, et Député du Gers dans la circonscription de Mirande (32) de 1936 à 1940.

Initialement affecté à « la mobilisation à l'aérostation », il disparaît donc en Service Aérien Commandé. La dépêche du midi s'en fait l'écho (10) . Wikipédia nous apprend aussi qu'il fut, après sa disparition, « dénoncé et critiqué comme ayant appartenu à la Franc-Maçonnerie par la presse du gouvernement de Vichy » ;

Nous avons cherché des descendants ou des membres de la famille de Paul Saint Martin, mais sans succès : si vous pouvez nous aider dans notre démarche, n'hésitez pas à nous contacter. Cela nous permettra de « boucler la boucle » de cette machine oubliée.

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