

FATAL TRAINING

July 1943

The squadron Kampfgeschwader 76 (« KG76 ») is based in Toulouse and flies with Junkers88. Since 1940, this Luftwaffe standard twin engine aircraft fights on all frontlines. It is also used as advanced training aircraft. In the south west of France, the young pilots of the KG76 train and throw dummy bombs made with concrete on a target (a huge white cross that can be seen from the sky) located in a forest close to their base.

On this 21 July 1943, the Junkers88 A4 serial number 885793 registered F1+FU takes off (picture1). On board, there is a four man crew: the pilot is Günther Rose, the gunner / observer is Werner Leistner, the radio Raimund Brückner and a crew member Helmut Illmer.

This aircraft is already an « old » aircraft : it was built in January 1942, it has been damaged in Tours on May 1943 (30% damage) during an emergency landing triggered by an engine problem.

This aircraft flies to the forest and starts its training for dive bombing, using its dive brakes located under the wing. Suddenly, the accident occurs. The aircraft collides with the ground at full speed. Its occupants have not had time to bail out with their parachute and they are instantly killed.

What happened exactly . Did the pilot make a mistake while flying ? Did he under evaluate his altitude and pulled away to late ? Did they have a technical problem ? (a collision with another aircraft ? Such accident occurred two months earlier in May 1943 when two JU88 collided in flight and crashed, taking to their end six out of the eight crews, see note 1)

The archives do not mention any clear explanation and we will probably never know what happened.

On site, after the crash, the German army takes away the remains of the wreck but hundreds of small parts still remain spread over in the ground.

Looking for this terrific fate aircraft

70 years later, this JU88 is forgotten, its crew as vanished from the memories. History has not retained any memory of this aircraft with a terrific fate.

On an aerial picture dated 1950 (map) the target that the crews were aiming at can be clearly seen: a white cross in the middle of the woods, with many impacts around it. The aircraft crash site must not be far away.

On site, we inquire and go from one door to another: two elderly gentlemen remember the crash. With an old historical French Renault 4L, they take us to the place where the drama occurred (picture2).

We follow our guides, through endless forests paths. Suddenly, on the ground, we can see aluminium parts. The Junkers88 F1+FU obviously ended its life there. The search can start.

Before any such search, a burdensome paperwork exercise must be performed : greenlight from the owner of the land, from the French Archeological directorate, etc... etc... A lot of paper, with explanations, pictures. We can't help smiling when we are instructed not to « gather any mushrooms, plants, grass and that flowers gathering particularly lily of the valley is strictly forbidden ». It is aluminium fragments that we are collecting, not mushrooms!!

The search and its results

Many small aluminium pieces are collected. But they are in a very bad shape. They are very small, torn, sometimes burnt. Clearly the aircraft collided with the ground at very high speed. The inertia of a 10 tons aircraft flying at 600 km/hour must be enormous.

The crash was so violent that, unfortunately, we find only a handful of beautiful parts. We will share with you the pictures of the ones deserving our attention;

Many airframe and skin fragments are found: you can see on the pictures how badly damaged they are (picture3 & 4).

An access hatch to a cap (oil or fuel) folded in two (photos 5 & 6), the front of a the altimeter FL 22320 which was on the dashboard (picture7), many Plexiglas shards (the JU88 had many transparent surfaces) (picture8), equipment components (picture9), cartridges from the MG machine gun (picture10).

This electrical wiring scheme (picture11) was in the communication box located next to the pilot and the bomber. This box allowed the crew members to communicate between themselves during the flight. It is probably the last equipment that was used by the pilot to communicate with his crew (picture12).

The parachutes buckle of one of the crew members (picture13)

This plate was affixed on a dive brake (picture 14). These brakes, fitted under the wing, were deployed during the die, to slow down the aircraft and enable the pilot to aim his target (on the image of the JU88 diving, you can see these dive brakes deployed under the left wing (picture15) A plate which was fitted on the fuel injection pump of the JUMO 211 engine (préfix « 9 » means engine). (picture16)

This marking is an indication (picture17) for a fuel quick jettison device (picture18).

Two parts show us the colors of the aircraft camouflage : light blue under the belly, and dark green above the wings and fuselage. (photos 19 & 20);

Here is a part on which letters can be seen : will some reader unveil what this marking means ?(picture21)

This rod is essential in our search (picture 22) : on it you can faintly see the serial number of the aircraft (Werk Nummer : « WNr ») : 5793. It formally confirms that we face the remains of the Junkers88 « F1+FU » N° 885793, that was written off on 21 July 1943, and not one of the two JU88 of 21 May 1943.

Next to the crash site, on a small path, the fin of an exercise bomb. The forest is plenty of those, and the foresters know them well.

(picture23).

The face of one of the crew members

Our chance and the strength of our network suddenly provide us with two pictures of one of the crew members, the gunner Werner Leistner, and its death notice. We can discover his face, he was young 21 year old only, and he was from the city of Linz in Austria (pictures 24 & 25).

Another task starts now: the search of his family or descendants. If we find them, we will let you know, with the spirit that drives us, memory and respect.

Please feel free to contact me at :

Gilles.collaveri@hotmail.fr

Note 1 : On 21 May 1943, the Junkers88 serial number 881484 et 886630 from the same squadron collide in flight in the same area. Both aircraft crash and are destroyed. The crew of the first JU88 is killed (Lt Joachim-Ernst Müller, Walter Pospiech, Herbert Meyer, Eduard Gruschka). On the second JU88 two crew members are wounded (Heinz Schmidt and Emil Meixner) while two are killed (Erich Lorey and Kurt Friedrich). Training was definitely dangerous.

Thanks to : Mr Barreau, Steve Polyak, Matti Salonen, Thierry Dormoy (images), André Halbeher