

INVESTIGATION IN A FIELD

Paul, today 94, is an aviation enthusiast. During WWII, as he later described to me, he was witness to an air crash. A German fighter had belly landed in a farmer's field at Plaisance du Touch village, a few kilometers from Toulouse. Paul showed me the place, explaining that the aircraft had impacted with several linden trees which line a dirt road leading through the property. And indeed today, these trees are missing from the row (photo 1). But failing any precise testimony, our search could not progress.

Until one evening in November 2017, at the end of a conference about aircraft archeology, one auditor approached me and describes exactly what Paul had previously told me. When I ask him if he has any further information about the crash, he answers "we can together meet Joseph. He is now 97, and he saw the crash when he was young". This was exactly the witness I was desperately looking for.

A CRUCIAL TESTIMONY

A few days later, we are at Joseph's home (photo 2). It is a moment full of emotion. Notwithstanding his elderly age, he lives at home with his wife. And he tells us the full story. His Memories are vivid. "it was in August. The year when I was obliged to leave to Germany for the compulsory work (so called "STO"), in 1943. I saw the German aircraft arrive. Its wings were swinging, it belly landed and during its course, it tore away trees. The pilot was wounded. The Germans came to save him. The aircraft had one engine, a round cowling, and the people living nearby procured the fuel left in the tanks. The wreck was taken away later on.

And Joseph shows us on the map the exact location of the crash.

Thanks to Joseph, new elements have appeared: the date of the crash (August 1943), and the aircraft type, a Focke Wulf 190 («single engine fighter with a round engine»: this is most certainly a FW190 since the Messerschmitt 109 had an in-line engine).

The German squadrons "Jagdgruppe Ost » & « West » were equipped with Focke Wulf 190 and were based in Toulouse Blagnac. Dozens of FW190s crashed around Toulouse, because the pilots were young and the aircraft were often old, coming back from the front line (thus suffering frequent failures).

ANOTHER TESTIMONY

Thanks to an article in the local press, another testimony reaches us, completing the puzzle. Georges (88) tells us: « before touching ground, the aircraft cut 5 telephone poles near this farm. Then, it belly landed and during its course, it collided with a plough machine with two wheels, and finally collided with the line of trees. It cut several trees and stopped after pivoting around the trunk of one of them.

The aircraft was quite damaged but more or less in one piece. I was told that the pilot was not killed. The aircraft was coming from here (and he shows us the East South East direction) ».

It looks like the aircraft was coming from Toulouse Blagnac airport. The localization of the parts found will confirm this theory. This FW190 had most probably a mechanical failure immediately after take-off.

PARTS CONFIRMING THE RUMOUR

After we have obtained all the necessary authorizations (owner of the land, farmer, archeological directorate) we start searching with metal detectors. Immediately, aircraft parts are found. They are made of aluminum, just like any aircraft during WWII.

- (1) Skin (thin aluminum layer on the airframe) one can observe the holes for the rivets.
- (2) Many scories (melted aluminum) found where the aircraft hit the trees; The hot engine metal melts when it hits the trees, confirming the end of the aircraft trajectory.
- (3) A component of a battery made of lead.
- (4) A bullet. The aircraft had weapons and was armed;
- (5) Pipe fragments (fuel or hydraulic systems) with different diameters
- (6) A thin aluminum part
- (7) Miscellaneous components: o-rings, electrical components, etc...
- (8) Miscellaneous fragments
- (9) Airframe parts. Some parts still have paint on them and even one **has** a marking painted on it.

We also have a cable holder typical of the German aircraft of WWI. This part confirms formally that we face a WWII aircraft.

OTHER ARTEFACTS

In addition to the aircraft parts, many artefacts are found.

Some agricultural parts, junk metal (paint boxes and tubes), a small metallic horse game, a cap marked « SGHP » (Société Générale des Huiles de Pétrole: created in 1921 it became in 1954 the Société Française de Pétroles BP).

We definitely contribute to the cleaning of the land !

We also find a bent fork, a French Vichy coin dated 1943 (was it in the pocket of one of the people who dismantled the wreck?) and many old plates and weights made of lead.

We also find a small Red Cross insignia which was on a jacket: maybe worn by one of the rescue team members who came to assist the pilot...

The whole story of this piece of land is unraveled through these artefacts.

THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE CRASH

After the discovery of the aircraft parts, we **search** through **the** German archives for August 1943 and we can't help smiling when reading this:

1943-08-05 JGr. Ost FW 190A-4 140673 Plaisance-du-Touch, 13 km westsüdwestlich
Toulouse Notlandung infolge Motorstörung. Bruch 60 %.

Translation: The Focke Wulf 190 type A4, serial number 140673, belly landed as a result of an engine failure on 5 August 1943 at Plaisance du Touch, and was 60% destroyed.

The story of this very aircraft is now known. Its trajectory can even be visualized (11). It performed a hard belly landing since it was destroyed by 60%. But it did not explode or burn, otherwise the destruction would have been closer to 100%. We now understand why the pilot was not killed.

We can even imagine the scene that occurred some 73 years before:

The weather is gorgeous on this 5 August 1943. The Fw190A-4 N° 140673 of squadron JGr.Ost has just taken off from Toulouse Blagnac airport. Its young pilot is only 19 years old and is learning to fly with this machine; but a few minutes after takeoff, the engine quits. A sudden failure has occurred. The young pilot desperately looks for a place to land, banking the wings to observe the ground, he spots a flat area with an alley of trees in the middle. He has no choice and counts on luck to pass through the trees.

He comes down fast and clips the telephone poles that were ahead of the landing strip. He continues, touches the ground, suddenly collides with a plough machine which was in the middle of the field before colliding violently into the row of trees. The aircraft turns around a tree trunk and finally stops. In the cockpit, the pilot's head is thrown against the windscreen, the pilot is hurt but safe.

A few days later, the German army arrives to disassemble the aircraft. In the field, soldiers break down the wreck of the FW190 and load the remains into a truck. During the war, aircraft wrecks were dismantled so as to reuse the metal, precious during WWII.

We will never know who was flying the Fw190 N° 140673, because the German archives recorded the names only when the pilot was killed.

Thanks to Joseph and Georges, an event of WWII has been reconstructed

MYSTERY IN PLAISANCE

All the elements found, the testimonies and the archives confirm that we face a FW190 crash site, but suddenly, at the end of the search, a coup de théâtre occurs!

One of our team discovers a splendid plate. We are all delighted but once it has been cleaned, we are stunned: this plate is American!

It was fitted on an US equipment, made by Bendix, probably a fuel pressure or flap indicator.

How to explain its presence on a FW190 crash site?

All the hypothesis are contemplated:

- Are we looking at a US aircraft crash site? The parts we found do not indicate clearly the nationality of the aircraft until we discover a cable holder which is typical of WWII German Aircraft. So, we definitely found a German A/C.
- Moreover, we give samples of aluminum to the French Laboratory CNRS/CEMES which has done incredible work on WWII aluminum alloys (in this respect, see the thesis of Toufa

Ouissi : <https://www.mdpi.com/2571-9408/2/4/172#>) and the result of their analysis is clear : it is aluminum made in Germany (the Manganese % is 0,8% which matches with the German rates : between 0,4% & 1%).

- Could the FW190 be equipped with American instruments? We think of pre war license that could have been continued. For instance, the Junkers88 had a WendeHorizont artificial horizon type Fl.22426 made under Sperry license. But upon checking with our network of experts, we receive the confirmation that the FW190 had no US component on board.
- Would this plate come from equipment thrown away in flight by an American aircrew? quite often, when the B17 had one or two engines damaged, they would attempt to lighten the aircraft by jettisoning any and all unnecessary equipment: machines guns, ammunition, loose equipment. But it would have been an incredible chance – quite impossible – that an equipment dropped in the air falls exactly in a field where a German Fighter crashed!
- Could this plate have been torn away during a fight with German fighters? Again, the chance that it would fall in this very field is almost zero and upon checking, we find 3 B17 crashes in the Toulouse area, one near Auch, another one in Cornebarrieu and the third one at Sesquières, the flight plan does not correspond to our field.

But upon checking in detail the story of one of these B17, an idea pops out:

The B17 « Old shillelagh II » crashed 50 kilometers West of Plaisance on 23 August 1943.
Our FW190 crashed on 5 August 1943, three weeks earlier.

Could we imagine the following?

End of August 1943, the remains of the B17 shot down on 23 August are gathered by the German army. Trucks make the shuttle between Auch – the crash site – and Toulouse – where there is a train station. During one of its **trips**, a truck stops over at Plaisance to load the remains of the FW190 that crashed there three weeks earlier. The truck stops in the field, the soldiers load the FW190 parts on board the truck, amidst the B17 remains, and during this operation, a part falls from the truck: the plate we found...

We have no formal proof of the above but the conjunction of several elements in the same direction lead us to believe that this surprising plate fell from a German truck while FW190 parts were loaded on board.

And if, as a regular reader, you have another idea, please share it with us !!

Gilles.collaveri@hotmail.fr