

SOMEWHERE CLOSE TO MORLAIX, TIME HAS STOPPED

6 August 1943

Two Mustangs fighters of the Royal Air Force are coming from the East, and they fly low to the direction of Morlaix. These aircraft are among the first P51's that have been delivered to the RAF, they still have the "Allison" engine which is a little bit underpowered. Later on, during the war, this engine will be replaced by the famous English "Rolls Royce Merlin", and this will boost the P51 that will then become the first fighter able to escort the flying fortresses into the heart of Germany.

For the moment being, our English Mustangs are used for « Rhubarbs » missions: attack of targets on the ground. These missions are so called because they have the same "laxative" effect on the pilots than the rhubarb plant, because of the dangers encountered.

The two mustangs have spotted a train: they turn, dive steeply and attack. The Mustang of Anthony Willcock has a problem, and it goes so low that its wing clips the telephone wires. This wing then hurts the railroad side slope and is torn off. The aircraft spins and crashes flat two hundred meters further, down the hill.

Jean Denouël, 16 year old, has heard the noise and he runs to the site. He is one of the first ones to see the aircraft wreck. On the top of a slope, a few meters above the aircraft, he can feel the heat of the engine which is still hot. The German soldiers are arriving and they are looking for the pilot, who is not in the aircraft. The crash has been so violent that the seat has been ejected out of the aircraft through the canopy, with the pilot still strapped on it.

Jean is also looking for the pilot. He will be the first one to find him, in the bushes: young, dark hair, still attached to his seat, with a yellow scarf, he has been killed in the blow.

This pilot, Anthony Willcock, was the father of a six months old baby when he was killed. This English airman will be buried in the military cemetery of Guidel, in South Brittany (photo 2)

4 August 2010

I met Jean at Morlaix Airport, between a Caudron and a Morane aircraft. He is 82, is in good health, he is an aircraft passionate, and he even sometimes flies an ULM. He knows by heart the aeronautic events that took place in the area;

While discussing with him, the idea arises to go on the crash site. This war event is carved in his memory. The vision of the crashed aircraft was so vivid in his mind that, after the war, he went to pray on Anthony Willcock's grave in South Brittany.

On a rainy morning, here we go: Jean takes me close to a railroad track, next to a beautiful typical Britton house (photo 3) then we go through a forest. We walk under the rain, and in the fog, then through a corn field (photo 4). Each meter, the leaves of the corn plants slam our face!

Then, we arrive in a lovely and quiet forest (photo 5) : I can hardly believe that such a tragic event happened there.

But Jean is absolutely sure : « here, not there !”

Honestly, I have doubts. It was such a long time ago...

But Jean is definitely sure: « it was there » !!!

But I can see only earth, leaves, and a little river flowing smoothly.

I start to search and suddenly.... I find a cartridge, then another, then parts. The remains of the P51 go out of the earth (photo 6) ;

Having the agreement of the land owner, we keep on searching and here is what we found:

Many aluminum parts coming from the engine, that exploded on the impact (photo 7), some airframe parts (photo 8) one of them bearing numbers (photo 9), a part made of steel, bent like chewing gum, thus showing how violent the crash was (Photo 10), connectors (photo 11), pipe portions (photo 12), a flight control cable wheel (photo 13 & 13 bis), a portion of component showing a screw with a wire (photo 14), a bent equipment support (photo 15) : I wonder what was this used for ?

A cartridge in the ground can even be seen without digging (photo 16).

My friend, Gilles, a weapon specialist in Toulouse will identify the marking on it : (photo 17) in his books, he will find that it was made by the Browning Cy in 1942, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, USA.

There are some parts for which the use is unknown: a round part with an protuberance in the middle (photo 18), the back of an instrument, probably a pressure measuring item (photo 19): an Oxygen bottle component ? an altimeter ?

We also find a coin dated 1941 (photo 20) : was it lost by one the people who moved the wreck?

We are surprised by four chromed collars (photo 21) : 67 years later, the chrome is pristine as if new, what an outstanding quality !

Our eyes catch an interesting detail, the marking: « Wittek MFG Co. Chicago Patent N° 2278337» (photo 22). This confirms that the engine was made in USA (maker: Allison) and not in UK (in such case it would have been Rolls Royce). It is definitely a Mustang I that we found.

But the most interesting items are still to be discovered...

Back home, I clean the artifacts when my aunt, who sits next to me, tells me: « did you see? there is something written on this part ». She is right. After cleaning the mud on a

black metallic part, we discover the following inscription (photo 23): « directional gyro serial number 24537 ». We have found probably the compass support.

But the most moving item is still to be found ...

We are finishing our searches, exactly 67 years (same calendar day : 6 August) after the crash occurred. Jean is quite moved to see the past coming back, when suddenly, we hear a clear sound. Jean helps me, digs with me and we discover (photo 24 / 25):

The panel watch of the Mustang. Built by Pioneer. One needle is still there. We are under the shock. (photo 26) We could not find an object more symbolic.

To be sure of what we have found, I post a question on a WWII specialized aircraft website (« 12Oclockhigh »), and I ask for a picture of the panel watch of the P51A : see what I received (picture in black and white). There is no doubt that we have found the panel watch of Anthony Willcock's aircraft.

Jean remembers that the Mustang crashed in the afternoon: I check the time difference between UK and France during the war, it is a very difficult subject because the time difference changed several times during the war between the two countries. But on 6 August 1943, there was no time difference.

The small needle is near the number « four » : it is likely that Anthony Willcock crashed around 4PM.

Now, we still have to trace Anthony's son: Christopher, to remit him these artifacts that remind the sacrifice of his father. He is probably around 68. I know that he got married in Hampstead in 1968, the London area where his parents, Anthony et Ada, originating from: the search continues.

I will keep on investigating to find Christopher Willcock, or his children and I promise I will keep you posted.