

## The mysterious bomber

### A special aircraft

10 November 1943, the Heinkel He 111 H-11 Werknummer 110070, coded GL+ET takes off from Cazaux airfield in the South-West of France.

This aircraft is not a standard He 111, like the ones which bombed England in 1940 & 1941. It is a test aircraft. It belongs to the « Erprobungsstelle Süd », an unit testing the new « Lotfe7 » D & H type bombsight (2).

During the summer and fall of 1943, the Erprobungsstelle Süd had already performed several flights with this machine in the neighborhood of Cazaux and Millau, dropping bombs to check the accuracy of this new bombsight.

On this day of 10 November 1943, the crew consists of Willi Dennert (pilot) (3), Herbert Waschk (Commander) (4), Karl Jüngling (radio operator), Herbert Gerlach (mechanic/machine gun operator), and Walter Hartung (chief armourer), where the two latest are part of the technical staff of the « Erprobungsstelle ».

Herbert Waschk has already been decorated several times while flying with Kampfgeschwader/Bombersquadron KG76: on 11 May 1942 he was awarded the Luftwaffe honor cup (« Ehrenpokal »), and on 5 November 1942, he was awarded the German cross (“Deutsche Kreuz”) in gold (5).

### A standard test flight that ends dramatically

The aircraft takes off easily and flies eastwards. But shortly after Albi, whilst flying at an altitude of 5,000 meters, the left engine starts burning and the flight controls are jammed.

Here is an extract of the accident report (6);

The aircraft becomes impossible to control. The pilot manages to bail out (7) but the four other crew members are trapped in the distressed Heinkel 111, and are killed in the crash that follows.

What happened? A number of possibilities indeed, but the most likely is that, whilst the pilot always flies with his parachute strapped onto him, the other crew members have their parachutes stored in a dedicated space in the fuselage (8 image 50). To bail out, they must each strap it on. It is thus more than plausible that the four crew members did not have time, in a spin aircraft, to get equipped with their parachute and bail out.

They may also have been stuck inside the fuselage by the sheer strength of the centrifugal force of the spinning aircraft. Whilst the pilot had an escape hatch above him (8 image 49) , with a rather easy access, the rest of the crew had to access a door, that could have been jammed.

Upon impact in a field, the aircraft explodes and burns. The pilot is the only survivor. The German army later retrieves the four bodies, and several days later, the remains of the wreck will be removed by ox-carts from neighborhood. Only a few parts will remain, deep in the soil of the field..

## **10 November 2013, discovery of the crash site**

By sheer coincidence, we arrive at the crash site (9) exactly 70 years to the day after the accident. All the necessary authorizations had been obtained from the relevant authorities, and from the landowner who opens his door in a very friendly manner (10) and the grand-father who had witnessed the crash shares his memories with us: he remembers very well that the pilot had safely bailed out, whereas the other crew members had been killed.

We begin to search the area and find the first parts of the aircraft.

What we find is in very bad shape as the field had been ploughed, which had torn and had further damaged the small aluminum parts which had already been damaged by the crash.

The presence of metal scories of melted metal (11) indicates that a fire had followed and the small fragments of bent aluminum sheets leave us to imagine the violence of the crash.

We found small components (12) and analyzed them to determine what they were for, which is most interesting. Here are some of the notable ones:

On this picture: (1) a dial gauge from an indicator (ii) an earphone that was fitted on a crews' headset (iii) a lighter that belonged to one of the crew members (most people were smokers at the time) (iv) a clamp (v) a buckle for a safety belt, (which could be from the one from the pilot's ?) (vi) Plexiglas fragment (the front of the He111 was made of Plexiglas) (vii) cartridges from the front gun (20 mm caliber) and from the rear machine gun (7,9 mm caliber) (viii) an equipment component beautifully made (ix) a thumbwheel possibly from the Lotfe7 bombsight(x) an electrical plug

A beautiful plate with instructions for filling the tanks with fuel (13)

Another plate, probably from an actuator (14)

An aluminum circle with marks: upon checking carefully, we realize it has graduations (15); it was a component from the compass (16).

Here the two most surprising parts:

The "Deutsche Kreuz Gold" that Herbert Waschk wore (19);

The altimeter is recognizable (18), even though damaged by the crash and the land ploughing. We can imagine the needle turning in the last moments of the Heinkel 111....

## **The story of the crew**

Having obtained the Luftwaffe accident report, we also obtain the personal addresses of the crews – in 1943 ! –

We ask our German friends for help to find relatives or documents/pictures and our networking proves to be efficient: one morning we receive a mail from our friend Christoph Regel who managed

to contact the pilot's daughter. She provided him with pictures of Willy Dennert and he looked so young on the military documents we had obtained.

### **History has its surprises**

An astonishing surprise was to come to us : Willy Dennert fought the war and died.....but only last January, only six months before we discovered his aircraft !

### **The medal in our hand is the one on the picture**

As for the German Kreuz, only one crew member had been awarded this decoration : Herbert Waschk.

An internet search promptly makes us discover a picture of him. On his chest is hung the medal we found in a field in the Tarn department of France;

History is a puzzle made of little pieces that we patiently gather, and some of them are the stories of the human beings who built it.

The pieces we found today allow us to better understand what happened to the Heinkel 111 W.Nr. 110070 and the fate of the young soldiers who were on board this forgotten aircraft.

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