

FOCKE-WULF FROM NYNICE - THE EXCAVATION OF A GERMAN AIRCRAFT

1. Historic Events

Already before the excavation itself we found out that we are dealing with a German aircraft Focke-Wulf FW 190, shot down by the American air-fighters on the 8th May 1945.

On the 8th May the capitulation of Germany became official, however, in Bohemia this news only led to the intensification of fights. The strong remains of the German army were defending the northern borders of Bohemia against the advancing Soviet army and at the same were trying to retreat to the west to the Americans that stopped already on the 6th May on the agreed demarcation line, their reconnaissance planes only monitoring the situation behind it. The positions of the 3rd US Army in the Pilsen region were monitored by the pilots of the 10th Reconnaissance Group.

Around Plzen only the pilots of the 10th Reconnaissance Group detected around 30 planes and accompanied them to their airport. Other German planes managed to get through unnoticed and were landing at various places already held by the Americans in Germany and West Bohemia. In total, approx. 300 planes escaped from the Czech lands on the 8th May 1945.

At 8pm 2./Lt. Leland A. Larson and 1./Lt George R. Schroeder from 15th Tac. Rec. Squadron caught glimpse of another two FW 190, flying above the Berounka river valley that were attempting to escape their attention. *"Pulling along side the 190's, the American wagged their wings in an attempt to lead them to an airfield. Not about to surrender, the Germans began to take evasive action and eventually crashed their aircrafts into the forest below in a desperate attempt to escape the Americans. Through no shots were fired during the engagement, this episode proved to be the final encounter between American and German aircraft"*, says the story of pilots of the 10th PRG Leland Larson [\[1\]](#).

However, the local chronicles (SokA Rokycany) and several eye-witnesses from Nynice and Nadryby describe the event as connected with gunfire: *"I heard gunfire and then I saw two American aircrafts attacking a German airfighter, that caught fire*

and fell straight down" and so create an incomprehensible mystery, why would the German pilots intentionally aiming to get to American captivity engage in fight.

The mentioned aircraft crashed down near Nynice, into a slope above the river Berounka and exploded. Part of the wreck fell to the river. The second German plane kept escaping for another 2 km in a low altitude flight above the river, but also crashed down near Nadryby [\[2\]](#).

The archaeological research could clarify whether the cause of the two aircrashes could have been the gunfire of the American planes, and produce finds, that could help to identify the German pilot. The archaeological research was also to find out the level of damage done to the site by previous amateur interventions. The research of the Department of Archaeology of the University in Plzen was part of the larger research project "Neglected archaeology".

2. Field research

Excavations near Nynice represented the first research of an archaeological institution on a crash-site in the Czech Republic. Aviation archaeology in the Czech Republic is mainly a domain of amateurs that however often do not document anything they do on a site. The crash-site is well-known among them and was visited several times during the years; the archaeological research hence also represented a revision of these activities and an attempt to find out, how thoroughly they undertake their "research".

The crash-site is located on the left bank of the Berounka River, approx. 6 metres from the water, 700m to the east from Nynice and 300m to the north from the ferry Darová.

According to the terrain and results of the mine-detector survey, three trenches were excavated. However, the aircraft accident remains occurred in the first trench only. Majority of artefacts was found right there. The most interesting finds are two plates with numbers 9-801, 422796, 14. Then there is the glass from the gunsight with guideline cross still visible, part of plastic with inscription FI. 3260, a 50 pfennig coin from 1935, exploded ammunition and destroyed aluminium bottle

3. Interpretation

With respect to the stratigraphical relationships the aircraft crashed straight down and the pilot did not attempt an emergency landing. On the site we detected at least

two main interventions after the event. They are most probably connected with the activities of the amateurs. They "mined" the site comparatively well and there were left only smaller pieces of the plane, difficult to identify. The most interesting are two plates with number on them. They come from the engine BMW 801, used in aircrafts FW 190. Sadly, these numbers do not represent any serial numbers, but solely number of one of the components of the engine that served for replacement purposes. Interesting are also two larger coating plates with preserved original colour.

All found artifacts are comparatively small and hence it was not possible to determine whether the aircraft was hit by gunfire.

4. Summary

The revisional research has shown that the amateurs "exploited" the site well. On the site there was left no important part of the plane that could help with its identification. The artefacts found only confirmed that the plane in question was Focke-Wulf FW 190. There were found no personal possessions of the pilot.

Both the pilot and his plane from Nynice however remain unknown. The last option that could help to clarify the event further would be an archaeological research of the site of the second air crash near Nadryby.

[1] A. Layton, *Wolverines In The Sky: Michigan's Fighter Aces Of World War I, World War II And Korea* (2005) 79 f.

[2] K. Foud - V. Krátký - J. Vládar, *Poslední akce - operace amerického a britského letectva nad územím Čech v dubnu a květnu 1945* (Pízen 1997) 148 f.

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