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Flugzeugwrackmuseum – The Planes and Pilots of the Second World War

Motors, fuses, parachutes, pieces of metal, plastic and glass. Belt buckles, handkerchiefs, good luck charms and photographs. The items in Flugzeugwrackmuseum tell stories of the pilots of the Second World War.



The first exhibition hall. (Photo: Sofia Paasikivi)

Seventy years have passed since the Second World War and, rightfully so, archaeologists are beginning to take a larger interest in this period, which has often been seen to belong to the field of historians. It is beginning to be recognized as a period that needs to be explored now that information can be obtained from living memory, since in the near future only written records and archaeological research will remain. However, archaeologists are not alone in using excavation techniques to gain new information about World War II, as there are also exhumation groups that are continuing searches for missing pilots. These groups have been doing this in order to both gain a

greater knowledge about the war and to give some peace of mind to the families of those pilots whose fate has been unknown for decades.

One such group is Initiative Fliegerschicksale Hessen e.V., who have been working alongside archaeologists at the international archaeological field school organized by hessenArchäologie in September of 2014. This field school excavated the remains of the British Halifax bomber LV881 which was shot down during the Nuremburg raid in the 31st of March 1944. The remains of the plane were found in a forest near the village of Steinheim near Hungen in Hessen where the material has been scattered across the wooded hill due to the plane's impact. Even though the main body of the plane was probably sold as a scrap metal right after the war, there are still artifacts that can be found on the surface over a large area of the forest.

Initiative Fliegerschicksale Hessen e.V. does not only recover pilots from World War Two but is also responsible for making their findings available to the public. The way they have chosen to do this is by opening a small museum not far from the city of Marburg. It contains items that vary in size from plane engines to uniform buttons. When visiting this museum it is possible to identify artifacts that were found on the recent excavation from similar planes or other examples of Halifax Bombers. By visiting the museum, we got a better understanding of the material that is found during excavations like this. The crash site we were excavating on our field school did not include any human remains, but in the museum we also learned more about the possible forensic side of the research.

Flugzeugwrackmuseum is a small museum with two exhibit halls and a small room where you can experience the feeling of being in an enclosed bomb shelter. Despite the small size of the museum, it covers the subject very thoroughly. It can also be an incredibly emotional experience, as there are a lot of photos of the pilots on the walls and a lot of personal items found during the excavations. From the museum staff you can hear many stories about the relatives of the pilots finally learning what happened to their loved ones.



Photographs of the pilots and a map of crash sites. (Photo: Sofia Paasikivi)

This museum tells the stories of pilots from the both sides of the war. After 70 years of living with the uncertainty it can be very emotional for the family to learn what exactly happened to their loved ones. For the visitor in a museum, it's also very moving to hear these stories and see the buttons and belt buckles that belonged to the pilots. It is especially hard in the cases where official reports turn out to be mistaken. In some cases these official reports have declared that the pilots died painlessly and immediately, but the research done on crash sites and the interviews of the locals who witnessed these crashes might contradict that.

Many families still wish to know the truth, even if it is worse than in the reports that were written about these crashes during the war. There are also many planes that were declared missing during the war. Initiative Fliegerschicksale Hessen e.V. aims to find these planes as well by interviewing local eyewitnesses and researching historical documents. Finding out the truth about what happened to the crews of these missing planes is also important part of the historical picture and it helps us to build more realistic and less glorified idea of what air war was like during the 1940's.

Getting a guided tour in the museum is strongly recommended, especially for those who do not speak German. Most of the texts in museum are in German and by getting a guided tour in English you will learn a lot more about the pilots and about the work done by Fliegerschicksale Hessen e.V.

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Entrance fee: 2 euros

Museum is open only on Sundays.

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<http://www.flugzeugwrackmuseum.de/>