



## **Memorial to WW2 Winkton pilots unveiled in Periers, France.**

The unveiling of this memorial dedicated to Lieutenants Ben Kitchens and Bert Espy, both American pilots of the 404th Fighter Group's 508th Fighter Squadron, flying from Winkton Advanced Landing Ground on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 1944, took place in Périers on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2017, exactly 73 years to the day, after the accident which took their young lives.



The two pilots were killed following a mid-air collision, just after they had completed a strafing run on a German armoured column, near Periers. The memorial contains the armour plate from the pilot's seat back, the engine and the propeller from Lt Espy's P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft. The base of the memorial is fashioned in the shape of a P-47 wing, with D-Day stripes and the blue and white star and bar US Air Force insignia.



404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group  
508<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron

Le 24 juin 1944, vers midi, six avions d'une mission dans la région d'Amersfoort, une patrouille de quatre chasseurs américains P-47 Thunderbolt et quatre Français.  
Tous appartenant au 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group/508<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron basé à Winton, dans le sud de l'Angleterre, revenant après la bombe tombée sur la ville.  
Quatre minutes plus tard, deux Republics, de P-47 212 numéro de série 233072 - immatriculé 7408 - piloté par le 1<sup>er</sup> Lt Benjamin F. Kitchens et le P-47 012 numéro de série 225747 - immatriculé 7409 - piloté par le 1<sup>er</sup> Lt Bert Espy Jr demandent l'autorisation à leur leader de quitter la formation.  
Ils veulent de repérer quelque véhicule à Amersfoort sur la route en contournant les collines. Les autres de message sur l'écran. C'est en affectant sa formation pour rejoindre le groupe que l'histoire de l'aviation s'y va d'ici, sur l'aéroport de celui de Kitchens.  
Les deux avions s'écrasent au sol. Les pilotes sont tués sur le coup, sont profondément enterrés par la population locale à proximité des lieux de crash. (Le cas de Kitchens, traité à la base.)  
Une vingtaine d'années plus tard, Henri Lanusse a été de son fils Christian, entrepris des recherches pour retrouver l'histoire de l'aviation de Kitchens avec une femme portugaise.  
C'est le moteur de son abandon, retiré quelques années plus tard de la gare de Lissieux, qui a servi de base à la construction de ce mémorial.  
Tous ne sont pas morts en héros mais leur sacrifice est pour notre liberté. Ne les oublions pas.  
Ben Kitchens est entré au commandement de Saint-James, Bert Espy est à celui de Longview (Texas) à l'USAF Langley.



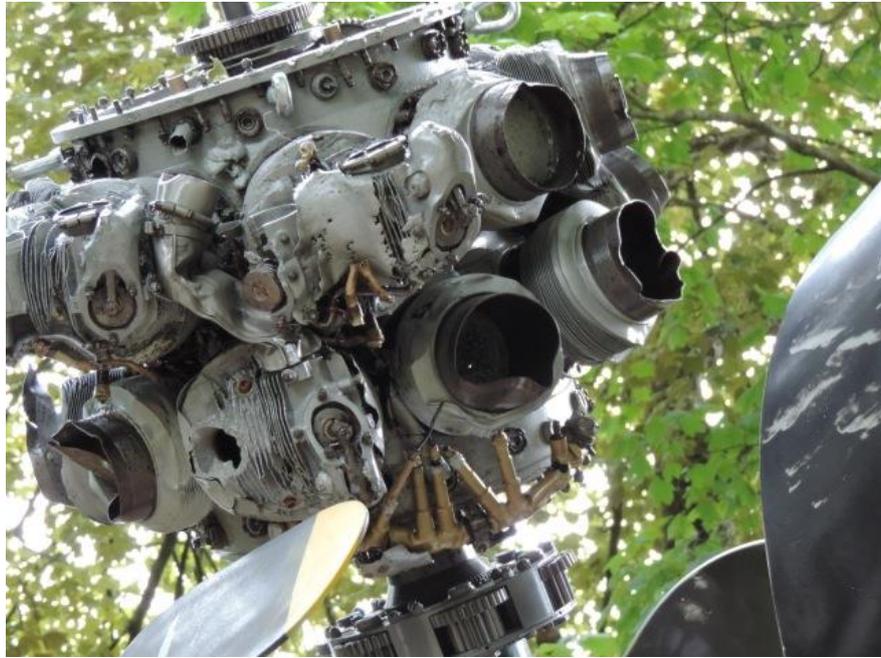
Benjamin F. KITCHENS

Bert ESPY Jr



On June 24th, 1944, around noon, a patrol of four Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighters, returning from a mission in the area of Amersfoort, five miles north of Winton. The aircraft, recognized by the black stripes on their tail fins, belonged to the 404th Fighter Group/508th Fighter Squadron based at Winton, in the south of England. Two members of the formation, 1st Lt Benjamin F. Kitchens, pilot of P-47 012 serial number 225747 (Registered 7409), and 1st Lt Bert Espy Jr, pilot of P-47 012 serial number 233072 (Registered 7408), asked their leader for permission to leave the formation. They had just spotted some German vehicles on the road for gas and wished to make a reconnaissance. The other pilots refused their request. This was in violation of the formation's rules. The two aircraft, however, decided to leave the formation to reach the town of Amersfoort. The P-47 012 was crashed and both of its pilots killed. The P-47 012 was temporarily buried by the ground. The P-47 012 was later recovered near the scene of the crash. A plane was found in the forest, the engine of the P-47 012 was located and taken away after the war. However, it was found that the pilot of the P-47 012 was dead. The P-47 012 was later found to be the wreck of Espy's plane. After a few more years, the remains of Espy's aircraft, including the engine, were scattered and collected by the local population. His name is used as the basis for this memorial. Ben Kitchens is buried in the American British cemetery at Saint-James. Bert Espy is buried in Longview, Texas, in the town.

Accompagné NORMANNDIA-Breton DIVISION LTD.



The memorial is the brainchild of Henri Levaufre and his then 12-year-old son Christian, who were sheltering in a farm nearby, when the tail section of Lt Kitchens' aircraft fell to earth after the collision, only thirty metres from the house. They found the burning remains of the rest of the aircraft towards le Béthelin, southwest of Periers, with exploding ammunition and the pilot nearby. They buried his body in a temporary grave on the spot. The other aircraft fell less than a kilometre away, close by the road to Monsurvent. The remains of its pilot, Lt Bert Espy Jr, were buried by the same family in the garden of their farm, not far away from the spot of the crash.

The wreck of Lt Espy's plane was located again by Henri and Christian Levaufre in August 1966, half a mile to the southwest of the farm. Espy's aircraft had dived into the ground at a steep angle, with the engine being driven several metres into the ground. After confirming the site of the crash, they left it undisturbed until 1983. That year, the site happened to be designated as the location for a new waste disposal dump for the town. Henri Levaufre,

then a city councillor, was determined that the aircraft should be recovered before this happened.

Finding aluminium panels immediately on initiating a dig, they recovered much of the aircraft, locating the engine, which was buried four metres deep. The engine was recovered and then kept in storage, before being recently renovated and specially treated, to allow it to be displayed as part of the new memorial. Since 2014, they have worked with many others in the town to make the memorial a reality.

REPORT THIS ADPRIVACY

This tale of devotion and persistence, spread over half a century, demonstrates once again the deep gratitude and respect that the local people of Basse Normandie have for all the Allied servicemen and women; the soldiers, sailors, and airmen, who strove to liberate them from four years of Nazi oppression and slavery in 1944. The kindness and reverence with which their sacrifice is still viewed today throughout this region of France is manifest. Young French children from the age of 4 or 5 are all encouraged to take part in local remembrance ceremonies, to lay flowers, in gratitude to and in memory of their young liberators, from over 70 years ago.

Being occupied is different. For those of us who have not known enemy occupation, it is difficult to understand the full impact and meaning of their loss of freedom and how vital and joyous it was for them to regain it, once again. Their gratitude will continue long into the future, passed down to the generations to come, with reverence and honour.



Lin Nancy Thurmond, Bert Espy's niece, and Major Jason Jarecke, a US Air Force officer representing the US embassy in Paris both gave addresses to the assembled company.

A local marching band and a United States Military Guard of Honor both attended the ceremony.

