

Résistance et Déportation dans la vallée du Rabodeau

Moussey. Témoignage de Christopher Sykes

Captain puis Major au 2ème SAS. L'officier de Renseignement de l'Opération Loyton

(Extrait des archives de Anthony Kemp)

« ... Every member of the SAS ought to know the name of Moussey . It is a small town situated in a valley of the Vosges mountains of Eastern France. It lies about 40 miles southeast of Nancy and about 10 miles north of St. Dié. Any SAS man who finds himself in Eastern France ought to go there. He will not be disappointed by what he finds. Like all the Vosges villages and towns, Moussey is spread along its valley, being a mile from end to end though never more than a few hundred yards across.

In September 1944 the Commanding Officer of No. 2 SAS Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel B M Franks, DSO MC, led the last of our parachute operations on French soil. The original drop was near Baccarat to the north and after many adventures we migrated to the woods near Moussey, where we made a headquarters. The operation occurred at a time when General Pattons advance to Nancy was held up by a supply breakdown in the army group to which he belonged. That meant that our mission, designed to last about 10 days, was protracted to about six weeks. During most of that time **we depended on the people of Moussey for many of the necessities of life, and for help of every kind**. They gave us everything we asked for and more. They were the staunches of Allies and in manifestly bad times, for with the hold-up of the American army, and the continued German reinforcement along the River Meurthe a few miles to the west, our difficulties increased daily. It was a nightmare time, but throughout it the civilian population was in far greater danger than we were. We could move rapidly from place to place, but except for a few of the men, the civilians could not, and if they did, they perforce left hostages behind.

At length at the end of September the Germans became exasperated as the help that they knew the people of Moussey were giving us, and they took their revenge. It was a terrible revenge, another hideous blot on the hideously sullied German record. They rounded up as many men from the population and interrogated them with the accustomed Nazi brutality. For no one gave us away, notwithstanding the Germans removed the men to concentration camps. The number taken to those horrible prisons was two hundred and ten. Only seventy came back, and some of the survivors died soon after their return as a result of what they had been through. In this disaster Moussey lost a tenth of its entire population. There is no evidence that even under torture and ill treatment **anyone of them at any time gave us away**. Our headquarters in the woods was never discovered by the Germans. I visited them after the war and found many relics of ourselves and no trace of our enemies having been there.

We ourselves suffered thirty-two casualties during the whole operation, most of them in other places, but ten of our men fell in the neighbourhood of Moussey. After the war it was decided, at the suggestion of the parish priest, the Abbé Gassman, to make a little SAS cemetery at Moussey in the graveyard by the church

In the late summer of 1945 the whole Moussey population and that of the villages adjoining came to the funeral of our ten. Since those to be buried were of different religions, the parish priest organised a bidenominational service. A Requiem Mass said in the church by the Abbé Gassman, followed by the Anglican service for the dead conducted in the church by the Regimental Chaplain, the Reverend John Kent, at present Vicar of Selby

At the gravesides the same order was followed; Abbé Gassman performed the Catholic rites, Captain Kent the Anglican ones. The neighbouring clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, attended. Sometimes today when talk turns to Church union and the great difficulties in its way, I remember that beautiful ceremony at which I was privileged to command the guard of honour... »

Addendum de Anthony Kemp :

« ... Christopher Sykes went on to say that a few years after the war the Imperial War Graves Commission decided, quite reasonably, that the SAS should be re-interred in an official cemetery. This was bitterly resented by the inhabitants of Moussey who felt that the SAS graves were part of Moussey. The War Grave Commission very sensibly appreciated the strong feelings and ties involved and designated the **Moussey graveyard as an official war cemetery**. Every year flowers are laid on the graves and on the 1919 and 1946 memorial. SAS men who visit Moussey feel a kinship with this town and its inhabitants; they are not foreigners or visitors but are part of Moussey history.

The Abbé Gassman was with the Mayor « the tower of strength round which the resistance in Moussey was so firmly built ». Not only that, he was also full of compassion, and after liberation did all he could to ensure humane treatment for Germans captured by the Maquis and decent burial for the German dead... »

Note :

Christopher Sykes, homme cultivé héritier d'une vieille famille noble du Yorkshire et grand voyageur, a écrit de nombreux ouvrages. L'un est « *Four Studies in Loyalty* » (Quatre Etudes sur la Loyauté). La 4ème étude, « *In Times of Stress* », a pour sujet le comportement exemplaire des habitants de Moussey pendant les pires moments de l'occupation allemande et l'Opération Loyton
Voir à ce sujet l'article *Loyauté* dans rubrique Notes/Notes



Eglise de Moussey. Le fanion du 2ème SAS installé là depuis le 18 août 45



Cimetière de Moussey. Les « Tombes des Anglais »