

Captain Jean P.E Maridor

(Free French)

Benenden Parish Church

Kent



Captain Jean P.E. 'Mari' MARIDOR. D.F.C.

Born at Granville, Basse-Normandie, France on 24 November 1920, Jean Maridor on leaving school had embarked on a career as a Hairdresser, but having taken flying lessons, had by the age of sixteen passed the first the first part (A) of his pilots examination, two years later gaining the all important part (B) full licence. With war clouds gathering, Jean enlisted in the French Armee de l'Air in May 1939, and was posted to Istres in the Rhone Delta of the South of France. With the increased need for more pilots, Jean underwent military pilots training which he passed, and obtained his military pilots 'wings' by the end of September 1939. In March 1940 he then was posted to a formation of Dewoitine D-520, arguably the best fighter aircraft available to the Armee de l'Air during the German invasion of France in 1940. Corporal (Pilot) Jean Maridor was ready for combat with his unit in June 1940, but resulting from the signing of the Armistice by Marshal Pétain, Jean and his comrades were ordered to destroy their aircraft and equipment to prevent their use by the Germans. Wanting to help avenge the fall of his country, Jean decided to try and reach Great Britain and offer his services in what way was deemed suitable, and to that end Jean left France on a fishing boat sailing from Biarritz. After being vetted, he was accepted for service with the Royal Air Force, and served as a pilot in 615 Squadron, R.A.F. but after several requests he was eventually posted to 91 (Nigeria) Squadron, R.A.F. on 14 February 1942. Pilot Officer Maridor had asked for the posting as he thought it would give him a good chance to engage the enemy in combat. A 'happy squadron,' 91 (Nigeria) was fairly cosmopolitan with several nations being represented by its personnel, and only a week after arriving at the squadron, Jean was joined by another two Free French Pilots, Pilot Officers J. Lambert, and H J M de Molenes, also both having joined from 615 Squadron, R.A.F. In April 1943, Jean's squadron and 41 Squadron, R.A.F. both based at R.A.F. Hawkinge, Kent, became the first to operate Griffon powered Spitfires, when they took delivery of the Mk XII. These

were used to good effect combating the low flying Luftwaffe Fokker Wolfe 190s, and moved to Ramrods and bomber escort missions, and in September 1943 became the highest scoring squadron in No 11 Group for that month. At 1230 hours on 3 August 1944, Jean Maridor took off on his last mission, flying Spitfire RM656, when he was over the coast at Rye, Sussex he spotted a V1 flying bomb, and gave chase to intercept and destroy it. Over the village of Rolvenden, near Tenterden, Kent, he fired a burst at the 'Doodlebug,' but to no avail, instead it headed straight towards Benenden School, which at the time was in use as a large military hospital. There is every indication from eye witness accounts, that it would appear Jean was both aware of what the outcome would be if he could not prevent the impending tragedy, and also the probable outcome if he got close enough to avert the V1 impacting on the military hospital. Diving down, and at incredibly close range he opened fire again, and the flying bomb exploded, doubtless preventing what would have been an enormous loss of life, but the resulting blast blew off the Spitfires right wing. Just eight days before he was due to marry his fiancé, Section Officer Jean Lambourn, he lost his life when his Spitfire plummeted to earth, impacting near a lake within the Benenden School grounds. Credited with the destruction of four German aircraft and eleven V1 flying-bombs, it would seem that Jean had been right when making his constant requests for a transfer to 91 (Nigeria) Squadron, R.A.F. to combat the Germans. With full military honours he was laid to rest in England, but in December 1948 his remains were repatriated back to France, and on 19 December 1948 he was again accorded due respect as he was laid to rest at Le Harve. In addition to being awarded the British Distinguished Flying Cross, his own grateful nation awarded Jean the Croix de Guerre with eight palmes, and during the years of the Second World War he was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and on 7 April 1952 was posthumously made a Commander, and other prestigious awards were made to him by France and Czechoslovakia. Around France at several locations, noticeably in and around Le Harve are roads, establishments, buildings and memorials etcetera honouring the life, gallantry and heroic self-sacrifice of the Free French pilot Captain Jean Maridor D.F.C., and fifty years after his death the picturesque village of Benenden, Kent added theirs to those of France with the memorial plaque as seen above in the parish church of St. George's.

