

THE FATE OF THE DEWOITINE 520 N° 505

The D520 had various fates. Here is the story of the D520 N°505, which first flew in “Vichy” French livery and after the markings of the Luftwaffe. Its remains were discovered 75 years later.

A NORMAL DAY

It is the afternoon of 4 November 1943. The Dewoitine D.520 aircraft of the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) JG101 training school are ready for takeoff from Tarbes airfield in the south west of France. Although the D.520s are French designed and built, during the German occupation they are used by the Luftwaffe for training its young pilots.

That afternoon, two student pilots sit in a pair of D.520s; each airplane is marked with a unique manufacturer serial number (MSN). Rudolf Tomasch (23 year old), is in MSN 693, while August Malle (20 year old) is in MSN 505.

SUDDENLY THE FOG ARRIVES

The pair of aircraft take off normally, but shortly after departure, fog suddenly arrives. The inexperienced pilots are not familiar with “IFR” (IFR = “Instrument Flight Rules”) procedures for

flying with no visibility outside the cockpit by using instruments.

Tragically, two crashes take place a few minutes from one another. MSN 693 flies low over Lannemezan, just above the trees along road N117, until crashing in a meadow among a herd of cows, but without harming them. The engine is torn off, the aircraft burns, and the pilot is instantly killed. MSN 505 is also surrounded by fog, which prevents its pilot from seeing a hill in the flight path. The plane collides violently with the ground, explodes, and burns, instantly killing the pilot.

Here is the testimony of a witness - Alice - that we collected a few months ago: she was 15 years old when the crash occurred:

"I remember a terrible shock in the mountain, it was foggy, and it was around 17H00, at the time when we took the cattle back to the barn. Along with other locals, we arrived at the site. I still remember vividly the image of this man (the pilot) he had a white shirt, he had been instantly killed in the crash.

That same evening, 4 or 5 German soldiers came to our house. They had left the body at the crash site because as they said, he was "caput". I don't know why they left him there, in the middle of the embers. They also said that they were fed up with the war, and that they would come and pick up the body the next day."

THE D.520 MSN 505 : A SPECIAL AIRCRAFT

Let's focus on Malle's aircraft, MSN 505, which turns out to be quite an interesting machine. We learn that before it was seized by the Germans, this aircraft was flown by Georges Garde.

Georges Garde is a strong character. He is one of the rare French « aces » (a pilot that has shot down more than 5 enemy aircraft) of June 1940.

When France surrenders in June 1940, his group is grounded. However, in 1941, he gradually begins to fly again in a D.520 at Toulouse Francazal airbase. In 1942, Georges Garde flies MSN 505, which was delivered in March 1942. This aircraft bears so-called "Vichy livery", flashy yellow and red stripes on the nose and the tail.

When on 11 November 1942, the French Free zone is invaded by the German army, the French aircraft are seized and used by the Luftwaffe for the training of their young pilots. This is the reason why this aircraft is in Tarbes on 4 November 1943, flown by August Malle.

As for Georges Garde, in the beginning of 1943, he enters the French résistance and escapes (via Portugal and Spain) to Northern Africa. Thereafter, he takes the leadership of the training center at Meknès in Morocco.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE REMAINS OF THE DEWOITINE
D.520 MSN 505

We begin each search with the same incentives: make forgotten persons live again by remembrance, share our findings by publishing our analyses, show the artifacts we locate by setting up exhibitions, and never profit from the results of our work. Foremost, we always respect the human beings who were involved in the events we uncover and all laws that pertain to our investigative research and physical recoveries.

The German archives provide us with the name of the village where the crash took place. First, we gather all the necessary authorizations. Then, we reach the place where the D.520 MSN 505 crashed. We are welcomed with a great kindness and are shown the location.

On site, quite rapidly, many parts of the aircraft are found; melted metal proves that a fire took place. They will provide us with interesting information, and analyzing these metal fragments is really a fascinating task because it allows us to understand the history of this aircraft.

TRACES OF PAINT

Let us start with the colors: the remnants of paint markings tell us the whole story of the aircraft. Several pieces still bear the red and yellow of the so called “Vichy stripes”: these were painted on the French aircraft after June 1940. They are still shining and bright, although they remained more than 70 years under the rain and the snow. The grey and the light yellow used to repaint

the aircraft after it was seized by the German Luftwaffe can also be seen:

There is the « night blue » typical of some French aircraft interiors. The color of the trim handle should make the model builders happy - they can see the actual color that was used in the 40's. Also seen is the « buff » color, a typical protection paint that was applied inside all French aircraft at that period.

THE PLATES

As this is often the case, several identification/data plates are found. A plate was installed near the gun camera support - you can read « Support Photo-Ciné SGD Standard Type Série N°5111 ». Look at the plate which equipped the propeller - you can read the name of the supplier : « Chauvière », as well as the propeller (=“hélice”) type, and the blades (=« pales ») type.

The plate on the bottom bears the number 563, which is not in line with the actual MSN of our aircraft. This plate was probably installed on a part removed from D.520 MSN 563 and reinstalled on MSN 505. (The practice of switching parts between aircraft is commonly named « cannibalizing ».)

PARTS ALMOST NEW!

In a barn nearby, some parts probably collected immediately after the crash are still there, untouched and looking almost new, 70 years later. There are two beautiful wheels with blades from the turbo-compressor and an electrical generator still in working

condition (*). The generator was certainly torn away “in a proper manner” during the crash.

OTHER ELEMENTS SPEAK TO US

On site, other discoveries are identified: a beautiful fitting under the wing, used to lift the aircraft; a portion of a steel quadrant which belonged to the braking system inside the wheel; a fitting from the signalization lever; and an aileron or flap portion on which you can still see the structure of the canvas (linen). Some glass fragments from the cockpit equipment are found, along with bits of red plexiglass that are certainly from the left position light.

These forgotten remains allow us to remember one of these beautiful aircraft, the Dewoitine 520, but also bring to life the memory of its pilots, a young forgotten German pilot, and the Commandant George Garde, a French ace of 1940.

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(*) This generator could fly again: it was offered to the association « Replicair » which is currently rebuilding a brand new Dewoitine D.551.

<http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2014/11/02/1983387-le-dewoitine-551-decollera-en-2017-2017.html>

It might be installed again on an Hispano Suiza 12Y engine.

GEORGES GARDE

In 1940, he flies with the French fighter squadron GC I/1 in a Bloch 152. During the French campaign, he flies over 50 missions between May 10 and June 25, 1940. On May 14, he shoots down a Messerschmitt 110 near Dinant (close to the Belgium border), and on May 17, a Henschel 126. Then, on May 20 near Chantilly, it is a Dornier 17 which falls to his guns, followed by another Hs 126 on June 5 near Orléans and a Heinkel He 111 near Royan on June 20.

When France collapses in June 1940, his group is ordered to stay on the ground. He flies again progressively in 1941, and his group improves with training, flying the Dewoitine D.520 in Toulouse Francazal airbase.

At the beginning of 1943, Georges Garde comes into the French maquis (« Alliance » network) and in August 1943, he escapes via Portugal and Spain to Northern Africa. He will afterwards be in charge of the Meknes training center. His personal Dewoitine will bear his initials « G G » as only the squadron leaders were allowed to do.