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FOUGA MAGISTERS OF THE BELGIAN AIR COMPONENT

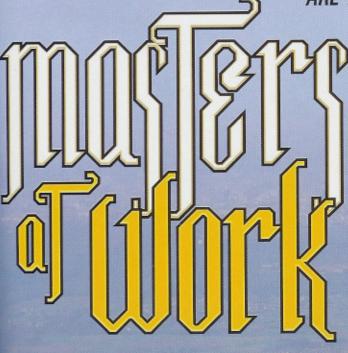
ARE PREPARING TO RETIRE, BUT MAY HAVE

A FUTURE CAREER AS JET WARBIRDS

or almost half a century, the V-tail Potez-built Fouga Magister twin-engined training aircraft of the Belgian Armed Forces have criss-crossed the national airspace. Initially, 45 Magisters were purchased in the late 1950s as replacements for the world-famous but obsolete North American T-6 Harvards used as primary training aircraft. The Magisters were earmarked to be operated by the Air Force's continuation flying training school at Kamina Air Base located in the southeastern province of Haute-Lomani in then Belgian Congo. Several Fouga Magisters, armed with nose-mounted 7.62mm guns, were used to protect Belgian citizens during "events" leading to the Congolese independence in July 1960.

In 2000, the Democratic Republic of Congo celebrated the 40th anniversary of its independence. At the same time, a limited number of Fouga Magisters of the reformed Belgian Air Component of the Armed Forces were still operationally used as proficiency aircraft for the service's staff officers that wanted to retain their flying status.

One of the very last air forces to fly the Magister, the Belgian examples are extremely colorful machines.



BY STEFAN DEGRAEF AND EDWIN BORREMANS

In the early 1970s, five additional ex-Luftwaffe aircraft were purchased to complement the Air Force's Fouga fleet that trained Belgium as well as Dutch pilots. At the same time, the Belgian Fouga Magisters achieved fame as tricolored mounts of the official Rode Duivels/Diables Rouges display team which performed for several years all over Western Europe as ambassadors of the Belgian Air Force. In 1977, the Red Devils team, previously operating up to nine - on one occasion, 16 -Hawker Hunter F.6 fighters, was disbanded as a direct result of 1973 oil crises-related defense cutbacks.

In the late-1970s, the operational future and even the ultimate survival of the outdated Fouga Magisters was threatened by the introduction of newly-purchased Dornier AlphaJet trainers and F-16A/B Fighting Falcons. Victims of the technical performance gap between the service's old trainers - including T-33s — and the new generation of supersonic Mirage Vs and F-16As, the Fougas were destined to be stored pending (most likely) scrapping. However, there is a possibility that the aircraft will be made available for surplus sale to civilians or museums.

Well-equipped but snug cockpit.

With a burst of smoke, the Magisters start up for the photo flight.





Distinctive paint scheme stands out from the forest below.

Low operating costs, abundance of spare parts and the relative good overall condition of the airframes saved the Fouga Magisters from total extinction. A large number of aircraft were divided over the various front-line fighter bases

of the Belgian Air Force to be used as liaison hacks and proficiency trainers for local staff officers and visiting NATO pilots.

Impressed by the Fouga's mission profile and success, the Belgian Air

Force even decided in the early-1990s to relaunch the aircraft maintenance and overhaul cycle, stretching the flying carreer of the aircraft. All maintenance was organized "in-house" at Brustem and, later on, at Bevekom Air

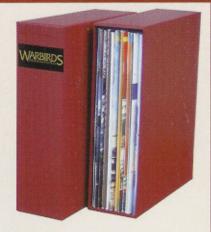
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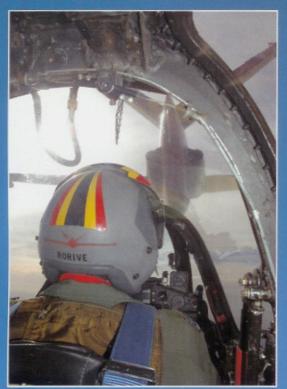
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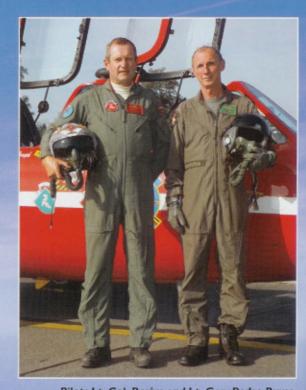
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Engaging in a bit of tail chasing.



Pilots Lt. Col. Rorive and Lt. Gen. Pedro Buyse. Magister pulls into the top portion of a loop.



A docile performer, the Magister is ideally suited to close formation work.

Base - nowadays home of the force's shrinking Fouga Magister fleet.

By early 2006, only five aircraft were still airworthly at Bevekom and operated by the Belgian Air Component's (successor of the Belgian Air Force) No.7 Squadron. Since 2001, all Fougas were assigned to the co-located Vormings & Evaluatie Centrum. This training and student pilot evaluation unit, commonly known within BAC as VEC, is responsible for the training of new instructor pilots on BAC's Marchetti SF-260 propeller-driven training aircraft. Until 2004, the unit also trained Alphalet IPs prior to the integration of BAC elementary jet training into the French Armée de l'Air pilot training structure.

Initially, BAC planned to finally withdraw the Fouga Magisters in December 2006, ending a flying carreer of almost half a century. However, it was recently decided, due to low operating costs and the fact the majority of pilots are still qualifed on the Fouga, to use the remaining potential of the aircraft. Therefore, the Fouga will be saved once more from extermination since three aircraft (s/n MT-35, -40 and -48) will remain in operation as hacks well into 2007. These remaining aircraft will gradually be grounded, having

reached the end of their airframe life: MT-40 on 8 March 2007, MT-48 (solo display aircraft) on 7 June and MT-35 (the last one) on 27 September.

For more than two decades, Belgian Fouga Magisters have been regular par-







ticipants in various international airshows. Since no "first-tour" pilots were retrained on the Magisters after its replacement by the new AlphaJets, all display aircraft were flown by experienced "middle-aged" pilots who, years before, gained their wings on Magisters. Display pilot rotation was almost exclusively triggered by forced pilot retirement at age 45. For some years now, officially retired pilots are re-integrated as volunteer-reservists. On occasion, these pilots fly SF-260s aircraft at Bevekom for continuation training.

In 2002, Lt. Col. (Reserve) Paul Rorive, a former Mirage V BA and AlphaJet/T-37 instructor pilot, became the Belgian Air Component's final official Fouga Magister display pilot. To pay tribute to the Red Devils display team, the aircraft was painted in a similar striking tri-color scheme using wingtip smoke tanks to good effect. On average, some 20 displays were flown each year in and outside Belgium.

To mark the pending withdrawal of the Fougas, Paul Rorive was contacted



by the BAC's last original Red Devils pilot, Lt. Gen. J.C. "Pedro" Buyse, to form a two-ship display team. Lieutenant General Buyse is also the highest-ranking officer in the service, being the Chief of Cabinet for the Belgian Minister of Defense Andre Flahaut. In spite of the Cabinet-related workload of Lt. Gen. Buyse and the busy display schedule of Paul Rorive, the pilots quickly created a close formation display routine, emphasing the Fouga's elegant airframe during stunning display maneuvers.

Initially, both pilots flew four Fouga missions to build up the lead sequence, followed by ten high-level (+6000-ft) two-ship training flights to train for the close formation routine. Finally, ten low-level flights (500-ft) were flown. The validation flight took place on 19 lune 2006, only ten days before the team's maiden display at the BAC's annual airshow at Koksijde.

The lack of excess engine power is hugely compensated by the experience and skills of both pilots flying within feet of each other during the routine.

Initially the creation of an "unofficial" four-ship Fouga team was planned, but due to high workload of the various pilots - all colonels with time-consuming management postings within the BAC — these plans were quickly put aside. The smooth aerobatic upgrading of all pilots proved to be too difficult to organize. However, during two public relations events at Bevekom in 2004 and 2005, four pilots flew a four-ship formation fly-by.

P-51 MALCOLM HODD

In order to complete the flying restoration of an historic Mustang, we are looking for any and all information on the Malcolm Hood canopy that was added to numerous Mustangs operating out of Britain. We are looking for original components, technical drawings, photos - anything and all relating to the Malcolm Hood.

Please Contact: John Muszala / PACIFIC FIGHTERS 2013 Foote Dr. Idaho Falls, ID 83402 208-522-3502 pacifigh@aol.com



Even with its limited engine power, the Magister is a graceful aerobatic performer.

Paul Rorive's 2006 end-of-season single-ship display was flown as planned at Duxford, England, on 8 October 2006. As a direct reaction to BAC's decision to prolong the operational life of the Fouga until late June 2007, Paul once more requested a renewal of his annually expiring reservist commission to be able - if granted - to fly and display the Fouga until the end of the aircraft's and (at the same time) his own flying carreer. After technical and financial evaluation, a positive decision was taken by BAC's commander Lt. Gen. Gerard Van Caelenberge.

The very last public Fouga solo display will take place on 1 July 2007, during the Defense Days in Koksijde. Before that, and depending on aircraft availability, Lt. Col. Rorive will participate in several airshows mainly in France, but also in Britain (Duxford and Kemble). The ultimate non-public display will be flown during the formal withdrawal ceremony which will be organized for the end of the Fouga-era in the Belgian Air Force, but this date is still to be determined. Lieutenant Colonel Rorive will personally be retiring at the end of 2007.

When finally grounded, without any hope of resurrection, the withdrawal of the Magisters will not only deprive the Belgian Air Component of its tri-colored ambassadors, but also force all staff "desk flyers" to retrain on the propeller-driven SF-260s.



