

## DO YOU LIKE ARMAGNAC ?

Obviously, it is not liquor we are speaking about, but the plane christened with the name of ..... the French province "Armagnac".

Indeed, it was the practice in France after the war to name its aircraft after names of French provinces such as Languedoc, Bretagne and Armagnac, aircraft which took off in the forties and fifties.

The SE2010 "Armagnac" (title photo) ("SE "for" Society of Aeronautical Engineering Southeast ") was a huge four-engine which flew for the first time in 1949 and only nine were built. The prototype crashed in Toulouse in June 1950.

Though technically quite successful, this aircraft was a commercial failure because its implementation relied on prewar concepts which were no more valid in the 50's.

For more information about the Armagnac, please refer to the excellent work of Laurent Gruz "Armagnac, the forgotten giant" (1) (in [www.livresaero.com](http://www.livresaero.com) and available at [http:// Www.aerostories.org/~aerobiblio](http://www.aerostories.org/~aerobiblio))

But back to "our" Armagnac, the prototype, registered F-WAVA.

His story is as follows:

June 30, 1950, shortly after takeoff from St. Martin du Touch runway, with two famous pilots on board, Leopold Nadot and Pierre Galy, a leading edge comes loose and is torn away from the aircraft. The Armagnac becomes uncontrollable. The pilots manage to return to the emergency runway, but soon the machine becomes impossible to control: it touches the ground outside of the runway. The landing gear is torn off, the aircraft spins and comes to rest on fire (2). Despite the dexterity of the pilots, two crew members are killed (by sheer bad luck: an electricity pylon in the axis of the trajectory cuts the cabin in two) and a ground worker who had come to help is killed by a truck. A naive pastel, found in the attic of a former employee who actually saw the accident, describes the scene (3).

More than Sixty years later, nothing remains of the accident. Fields and countryside have been transformed into a huge assembly line by the Airbus company and the plants now produce Airbus aircraft and ATR turboprops (4). Even the monument in memory of the victims, set up at the roadside in the 50s, has disappeared!

But one day, going through the book mentioned above, I discover an aerial photo of the prototype after the accident. (5)

This photo shows that the aircraft stopped at a place where private persons live today.

I immediately get in contact with the owners of this property: with kindness and spontaneity, they let me enter their garden and they allow me to search for possible elements, that may remain after the tragedy that occurred there 60 years ago ..

At first glance, you cannot imagine that a plane burnt here (6).

However, a few minutes of research confirm the validity of our approach: some remains of the aircraft appear (7). Washer (8), fragments of pipes (9), a part with still some marks of red paint remaining (10) a structural part with rivets (11) a part with a nice aerodynamic shape but whose function is unknown (could it be an iron not related with the aircraft?) (12) fragments of the outer surface of the aircraft is called the "skin", twisted and crushed (13) a strange pipe that turns out to be the valve of the inner tube of the tire (look at the cap that you can unscrew, you have the same on your bike) (14), and many aluminum scories (15) because the fire was very violent (16) and the metal has melted.

We have just found the last existing parts of Armagnac that still exist : the last aircraft of this type was unfortunately scrapped in Bordeaux Merignac in 1975.

(Definitely, France is struggling to keep the memories of the past!).

These remains will be given to future air museum in Toulouse, "Aeroscopia" which will open next year.

Later on, I discover later that the sons of respectively Pierre Nadot and Leopold Galy namely Claude Nadot (17) and Jean Jacques Galy (18) live in the area: I contact them and I am warmly received by both. They accept with emotion fragments of the plane that was piloted by their father.

And you know what? The Armagnac was manufactured in the same assembly line where the ATR Aircraft is today assembled, ATR is a company in which Claude Nadot, the son of Pierre Nadot, worked, ATR is the company where I am now working, and ATR's address today is current address is ... 1 Allée Pierre Nadot!

As a conclusion, the circle is completed.. .

Thanks: Marie Bonzom collection Dieuzaide Jean, Jean-Jacques Galy, Laurent Gruz, Gilbert Millas, Claude Nadot and owners of the land, for their hospitality and kindness;!

Léopold Galy Narration of the crash

(published with the agreement of his son, Jean Jacques Galy)

Friday 30 June 1950, 2PM30, we take off from Blagnac airport to perform the 103th test flight: a routine flight.

We push the power lever and we take off.

At that very moment, the control tower contacts us «you have lost some thing ». But without precisising what we lost.

Pierre Nadot asks to Avril, the mechanic, to go to the back of the aircraft to check what happened. He comes back and says: « we have lost a portion of leading edge, we must land as soon as possible ».

At that moment, we are climbing full throttle, and nothing abnormal has happened.

We are at an altitude of 100 meters, with the landing gear retracted. Nadot decides to land and requests landing priority on the emergency runway.

We reduce power and suddenly, everything shutters and flutters in a terrific manner, there is no way we can control the aircraft.

We are bent on the control pedals, Nadot yelling « Pull, for christ's sake, pull!.. » But the vibrations are so strong that we cannot even keep our feet on the rudder pedals.

The ailerons start to flutter. We try to turn to be aligned with the emergency runway but we almost stall and we must resume power.

The Armagnac is terribly leaning to the right and the vibrations go increasing. It is impossible to get in line with the runway, so we touch the ground, and we go straight in front of us.

When we “land”, the aircraft is still inclined with a 30° angle.

However, the contact with the ground is a bit rough but still acceptable.

We go straight on, in front of us, at a speed of 200 km/h, crossing the fields, although we have switched off the engines. The enormous weight of the machine is taking us very fast and it does not slow down.

We are sliding in a crazy aircraft, and we can't do anything.

At that moment, it could still have been gone well if we had landed on the runway, we would have had only limited the damages.

But on this bumpy area with ditches and obstacles, we can only wait, hoping that it slows down.

Suddenly, in front of us, a barn, covered with red tiles. We are rushing onto it and I can't help thinking that all is over, and that we will explode against it

We collide with the building full speed; I see a red lightning, the tiles are flying around us !

And we keep on sliding crazily, the right landing gear has been torn away.

The aircraft starts rotating left, and suddenly, the fuselage strikes a high voltage pole.

Under the shock, which has been terrible, the cabin is cut in two; The front of the aircraft in which Nadot and I are is thrown 20 meters away. We are lucky: the seat attachments break just above the floor, and we are thrown away, still attached by our harnesses to the seats.

We pass across the torn skin without getting hurt, and we end in a field, dazed, but basically unhurt.

Unfortunately, it is different behind us but we will learn it later on.

By an incredible bad luck, our colleagues mechanics Gabriel Clerc et Michel Leroy are exactly at the very place where the fuselage stroke the pole : they have been instantly killed.

I regain consciousness in the field, strapped on my seat, unable to get out of it, with Nadot next to me.

I see Avril helping us to get free.

I apparently have only superficial bruises, but I am bleeding a lot and Nadot is like me.

We hear explosions and we understand the Armagnac is fiercely burning. Sixteen Thousand liters fuel are ignited;

By chance, the wind is blowing in the good direction and pushes the flames away from us.

We are very close to the aircraft, a few meters away from the crash site.

We try to run away as far as possible, our legs are shaky, and with Avril, we bump in the fumes into something soft: it is an inert body, lying on the grass, covered with metal parts that have been thrown all around.

I recognize Arnaud. The “Lieutenant de Vaisseau” Arnaud was with us in the flight as an observer of the pilots. His task was to perform tests for the “Centre d’Essais en Vol » (test flight center) and to get used to flying the Armagnac.

He has been very close to death. In order to observe properly our maneuvers, he was sitting immediately behind me.

Where he was standing, he could have been crushed, and he has been only hurt.

His second chance is that we run into him. Had we walked a few feet away from him, we would not have seen him, and he would have died in the blaze.

With Avril, we pull him away, one holding his feet, the other his head, and we take him out of the fire. We walk around the fire wall, which is spreading minut after minut, and we get out of the black smoke wall.

We suddenly see a dozen of persons watching us as if we were ghosts: Avril and I pulling Arnaud, the three of us are covered with blood on our white flight suits.

They watch us, standing still, as if we frighten them. We scream “ come and help us” !!

This wakes them up. They arrive, running, they grap Arnaud and carry him away.

Around us, it is a total panic. A fire truck arrives full speed and runs over a worker of the factory, Jean Guillotteau, who was coming to help and provide assistance, and kills him ! Blinded by the smoke, the driver has not seen him.

It is apocalypse. Sixteen Thousand liters of fuel burning, explosions one after the other in the airframe: oxygen bottles or other stuff ...

I watch this, covered with blood, devastated: a gentleman I do not know takes my arm and says « come with me, I shall take you to the hospital ». He sits me in his car, and he drives me to Purpan Hospital. He is a doctor who was driving there by chance. Seeing the inferno, he stopped. I remember I told him in the car : « I don't know if I will die but I feel ok » ;

At Purpan hospital, they immediately take me to the emergencies. They clean me, examine me on. It quickly appears that I have only a few superficial bruises but nothing serious.

When my wife rushes later on in my room very worried, she is immedialtely reassured when she sees me sitting on the bed, chatting with the nurses.

After effusions, and when she is convinced that my wooden head once more went successfully through the shock, I tell her: “ I need to go back to the runway, I must see something quickly”.

Everybody yells but I hang on « I want to go back to the aircraft, I must see something »

Although I apparently have no real wound, I have received a big impact on my head.

When I am being treated and bandaged, and when people speak to me to reassure me, I can't help thinking “ You did not switch off ignition, it is your fault if the aircraft burnt ».

And I want to go to the wreckage to see if ignition has been switched off or not.

It is an obsession : I MUST go there and check

I insist so much that Mr Rey, the engineer who drove my wife to the hospital finally accepts to take me to the crash site.

I go to the cockpit which is intact, because it was thrown away from the blaze, and I look for the fork which is supposed to switch off the four engines at once.

I can't find it, I get nervous, I panic.. and I suddenly realize that this fork does not exist on the Armagnac, it is specific to the « Languedoc » aircraft ! On the Armagnac, it is a push button. You can see how blurred I was.

I find this push button, I check it, it is on "off" position.

The aircraft burnt because the tail touched a high voltage line while sliding...