GUSTAV BUILT FOR TWO

THE MESSERSCHMITT BF 109G-12 WAS CREATED TO HELP INDOCTRINATE NEW LUFTWAFFE PILOTS TO THE CHARACTERICS OF GERMANY'S MAIN FIGHTER TYPE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD PAVER, SIMON BROWN, ALPHA ARCHIVE, AND MICHAEL O'LEARY

Any student of the history of World War II aerial combat knows that the Messerschmitt Bf 109 series suffered a disproportionate number of landing and takeoff incidents. A lot of this was due to the narrowness and geometry of the main landing gear but also to the fact that the fighter was designed to be operated from sod runways, pointed directly into the wind for landing and takeoff. Anything else made these events a bit difficult. As the war progressed, the German aeronautical industry developed an extremely efficient system for repairing and returning these damaged fighters to service in a minimal amount of time (provided they were rebuildable to begin with).

Most nations developed some form of dual-control trainer for their main fighter series, but few of these were built in substantial numbers. For the *Luftwaffe*, the Bf 109G-12 was created as a dual-control trainer to aid pilots transitioning to the type. This was not a new build aircraft, but rather a conversion of G-2, G-4, and G-6 airframes. Also, these aircraft were not given new serial numbers but retained their originals.

Visibility was never the 109's strong point and instructors in the rear seat must have had nerves of steel as the student in the front advanced the Daimler-Benz throttle for takeoff. Airframe conversion (we do not know how the airframes were picked — they could have already been damaged aircraft slated for repair) was done by Blohm & Voss in Hamburg and the Bf 109G-12 was the most numerous of any Allied/Axis two-seat trainer conversion with some 494 G-12s being completed between September 1943 and December 1944.

The Bf 109G-12 with the Merlin and Hispano cowlings fitted firewall forward. (R. Paver)

To accommodate the two-seat modification, the G-12's fuel filler point was moved aft between fuselage frame 4 and 5 and this meant the fuel capacity (already not very high) was reduced to 235-liters from the standard single-seater's 400-liters (and this would lead to the extended range Bf 109G-12/R3 fitted with a 300-liter drop tank on the fuselage centerline). The instructor was in the rear seat and utilized an intercom to communicate with the student pilot up front while his visibility was slightly improved with the odd "bowed" canopy side panels.

With the end of the war, numerous examples of the Bf 109G-12 were captured and some may have even flown in Allied hands but there was no need to save any of these airframes for technical evaluation and they were all eventually destroyed. The dual-control 109 was soon a rapidly fading footnote in aviation history.

Let's fast forward into the mid-1960s when plans were underway to produce the epic movie *The Battle of Britain*. Producers needed *Luftwaffe* aircraft, but they were all gone so a deal was done to obtain numerous examples of the Rolls-Royce Merlin-powered Hispano HA.1112-M1L *Buchon* from the Spanish Air Force. One of these machines was serial C4K-169. Registered in Britain as G-AWHT for film work, the aircraft found its way to the Confederate Air Force after the movie had been completed. Shipped to Harlingen, Texas, it was registered N9939. The *Buchon* was never really restored but it was maintained and given a new paint scheme as a *Luftwaffe* fighter. During the big annual CAF airshow in October 1976, N9939 was out doing its thing during an airpower display. The pilot decided to make a low pass — a really low pass. In fact, he decided to fly so low that, to the amazement of spectators, he flew at very high speed right into the ground!

Fortunately, he kept the wings level and, due to the high speed, the fighter skidded for about 1500-ft before coming to a stop. The armored canopy was thrown back, the pilot jumped out, and beat a hasty retreat. Spectators had to be told that this was NOT part of the scheduled airshow.

With the Daimler-Benz at full tilt, Charlie Brown blasts aloft in the freshly restored Bf 109G-12. (R. Paver)