



# THE MOST BRILLIANT STORK

The **Bell & Ross** Vintage WWI Guynemer celebrates man and machine.

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BY JAN TEGLER



LEGENDARY GEORGES GUYNEMER, FRANCE'S SECOND HIGHEST-SCORING ACE, RECORDED FIFTY-THREE VICTORIES BETWEEN JUNE 1915 AND SEPTEMBER 1917 FLYING A SUCCESSION OF AIRCRAFT HE NICKNAMED "VIEUX CHARLES" (OLD CHARLES). BUT CAPTAIN FELIX BROCARD, COMMANDING OFFICER OF ESCADRILLE 3, THE SQUADRON GUYNEMER SERVED WITH THROUGHOUT THE WAR, HAD HIS OWN DESCRIPTOR FOR THE MODEST BUT DRIVEN FRENCH PILOT, CALLING HIM - "...MY MOST BRILLIANT STORK."

**THE STORK OR CIGOGNE, WHICH GRACES THE DIAL** of Bell & Ross' new Vintage WWI Guynemer, is the famed symbol of Escadrille 3. Established in 1912 as one of the five original units of the Aéronautique Militaire, French Army's air arm. The squadron moved from central France (Avord Army Camp) to Champ de Mar in the Alsace region the same year.

The unit's departure from Avord in the white-winged Bleriot XIs which then equipped it was likened to the migration of the white Storks that arrived in Alsace annually just before spring.

But Escadrille 3 wasn't formally known as the stork squadron until 1916 when Captain Brocard ordered that clear symbols be painted on the unit's aircraft so that its pilots would be able to identify each other in the heavy fighting over the Somme. Brocard chose a styl-



Captions



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ized representation of the stork penned by Warrant Officer Charles Borzecki, a set designer for French comic opera before the war.

By that time, Guynemer, who joined the squadron in June 1915, had already become an ace. His first kill was made on July 19, 1915, flying a Moraine Saulnier L, one of the first airplanes ever used for combat. Unarmed, the eighty-horsepower monoplane was intended for observation and light bombing, but Guynemer fitted a machine gun to the difficult-to-fly Moraine.

With it, he and observer-gunner Jean Guerder shot down a German Aviatik reconnaissance aircraft near Soissons. Corporal Guynemer had inherited the machine from fellow pilot Sergeant Charles Bonnard and to commemorate his first victory, named the airplane and his successive craft *Vieux Charles*.

By December 1915, Escadrille 3 had reequipped with a new biplane from French firm Nieuport - the Nieuport 10. The Nieuport 10 and the larger, stronger Nieuport 12 which rapidly followed it into service were the first true fighter aircraft fielded by the *Aéronautique Militaire*. Eventually equipped with synchronized, forward-firing machine guns, Guynemer put the very maneuverable Nieuport 10/12 to deadly use, achieving 25 kills by year's end.

Before 1916 closed however, newly promoted Lieutenant Guynemer and Escadrille 3 began to receive the Spad VII, a more powerful if less maneuverable fighter than the Nieuport, capable of 119 mph. Fitted with a single synchronized Vickers machine gun, more than 6,000 examples of the type were produced. Guynemer scored more victories with the new Spad but, exacting as ever, criticized the airplane as being inferior to new fighters being introduced by the Germans.

Such was Guynemer's reputation as an ace pilot and French national hero by this time that Spad's chief designers incorporated several changes he had suggested into the models that followed - the Spad XII and XIII. Produced in greater numbers than almost any other allied fighter (6,000 were built for the United States), the landmark Spad XIII was a dominant type during the last year and a half of the war.

Powered by a 235-horsepower Hispano-Suiza inline engine, it achieved 138 mph in level flight and could maneuver more nimbly than its predecessor. Guynemer used the type to score his final victories, fitting one with a unique 37 millimeter cannon mounted through the propeller shaft.

France's most brilliant stork met his end flying one of three Spad XIII's at his disposal on September 11, 1917, shot down near Poelkapelle by Lt. Kurt Wissmann of Jasta 3. ●