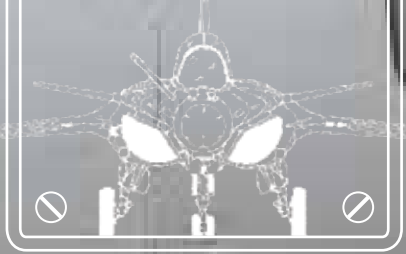


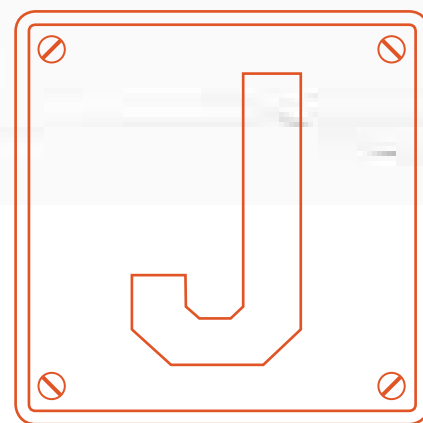


Caption here, Parum fuga. Et enimus et et postotae nobis est et coria venis eos non remqui torum doluptae



**DASSAULT  
FLIES  
HIGH**

THE STORY BEHIND THE FRENCH FIGHTER JET AND THE NEW BELL & ROSS BR-03 RAFALE CHRONOGRAPH.  
BY JAN TEGLER



**JUST BEFORE THE FAMED PARIS AIR SHOW'S** opening in June, Bell & Ross invited Dassault Aviation CEO Eric Trappier and French Air Force Rafale Display pilot Capitaine Benoit "Tao" Planché to its Paris headquarters to officially present them with two examples of the limited edition BR-03 Rafale chronograph (500 pieces) the French watchmaker debuted at Baselworld 2015.

At once a press event and a celebration of the ongoing partnership between Bell & Ross and Dassault, there was more significance behind the ceremony than most in the watch world comprehend. The launch of the BR-03 was auspiciously timed.

"The Rafale is a plane which is already known for its operational qualities but it needed to achieve commercial success," Trappier noted. "This it has done!"

To understand the subtext of Trappier's remarks and why the release of the BR-03 Rafale chronograph is so timely we have to go all the way back to 1985.

**FRANCE GOES ITS OWN WAY**

In 1985, France announced that it would not join West Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain in the fighter aircraft program that would eventually yield the Eurofighter Typhoon - now in service in Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain and a direct competitor to the Rafale.

France had been a partner with these other western European nations in the "European Collaborative Fighter" (ECF), an effort originally launched in the mid-1970s. It was aimed to capitalize on the economic and engineering capacities of the group to produce a new multi-role fighter aircraft.

But the French government had requirements which the (ECF) did not address. In addition to a land-based fighter for the French Air Force, the government desired a naval version of the airplane which could operate from the French Navy's aircraft carriers Clemenceau and Foch. France also wanted

Caption here, Parum fuga. Et enimus et et postotae nobis est qui coria venis eos non remaqui torum dolupt Optatia vide pliqui connimus, omnimil maxim quatur? Rumquas quo beati ut re

**THE RAFALE IS THE RESULT OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN DASSAULT AND BELL & ROSS.**

a lighter, more versatile fighter than its partners and a leading role in the industrial cooperative.

With its partners unwilling to accept these stipulations France withdrew from the collaboration in the summer of 1985, launching its own program for a multi-role fighter with Dassault Aviation. The new aircraft - dubbed Rafale, French for "gust" or "burst" - would consolidate roles previously performed by a range of specialized platforms in one airplane.

The decision led to protracted development of France's fighter for the 21st century.

**FRENCH FIGHTER, FRENCH WATCHMAKER**

The Cold War had been over for nearly four years by the summer of 1993 and France, like most of its western counterparts, began a military drawdown, drastically reducing its defense spending. The Rafale program was an easy target for cuts and took a \$340 million hit in the 1994 French defense budget.

The reduction had knock-on effects for the entire program, from decreasing the number of aircraft to be produced and the rate at which development and testing could go forward to increasing the cost per-aircraft.

While 1993 proved difficult for the Rafale, the watch world was experiencing healthy expansion. That same year two life-long friends, Bruno Bellamich (Bell) and Carlos A. Rosillo (Ross) founded Bell & Ross, collaborating with Helmut Sinn to launch their brand employing existing Sinn models as base for their own timepieces.

As Rafale funding cuts took effect in 1994, Bell & Ross issued its version of the Space 1, the automatic chronometer worn by the German astronaut Reinhard Furrer on the Spacelab mission in 1983. The mission-oriented timepiece set a tool-watch theme for the brand that it built on over its nine-year Sinn collaboration. Later models included the Bomb Disposal Type, Space 3 and Hydro Challenger.

Meanwhile, progress on the Rafale continued slowly with three types in development including the single-seat Rafale C, two-seat Rafale B and the navalized Rafale M.

**TAKEOFF**

Production versions of the Rafale finally made their debut with the French Navy in the year 2000. Less than twelve months later Bell & Ross



was purchased by fashion giant Chanel and the watchmaking company took quickly became the aviation-inspired brand we know today.

After almost four years of training, the Rafale M was declared operational with the Aéronavale in 2004. Another two years passed before the French Air Force (Armée de L'Air) declared its Rafale Bs and Cs operational. By then, the total number of the new aircraft planned for procurement had fallen from the 336 Rafales originally envisaged to just 180.

Slashed nearly in half, the Rafale program was in desperate need of export customers to keep production lines open and unit cost down. But for more than a decade Dassault had no takers for its fighter. The lack of sales success became known as "the Rafale curse".

But early this year, the program's fortunes rose dramatically when Egypt and Qatar had agreed to buy twenty-four Rafales each. These were followed days later with the news that India had finally promised to buy thirty-six Rafales. A fourth customer, the United Arab Emirates, is also possible.

Finally, the Rafale is the export/commercial success Dassault's CEO knew it must become to make France's 4.5 generation fighter a viable option at home and abroad.

**BR-03 RAFALE**

The chronograph that pays tribute to the Rafale is the result of close cooperation between Dassault and Bell & Ross - an effort begun with the BR 123/126 Falcon models the two debuted in 2013 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Dassault Falcon.

"We share the same values," Bell & Ross cofounder Carlos Rosillo says of his firm and Dassault - "a passion for aeronautics, a quest for excellence and the required innovation to develop new products. We put our competences together to come up with a model from the BR-03 iconic watch."

"We use ceramic for the case which is also used in the aviation industry" he explains. "The colors of the dial match those of the Rafale with a furtive grey. Equally, the typography applied on the dial was inspired by the Rafale. The orange touch of the chrono functions is what catches the eye in the aviation world." Trappier adds that it "seemed a natural step to also venture into the military world with Bell & Ross to make the parallel between the Rafale fighter aircraft and a watch which is specifically modeled on this image."

"The Rafale is meeting with international success," he concludes. "So this was the perfect time to launch a watch which represents this value of success."