



WINGS OVER PERU

The Nieuport-Delage 121C1 in Cuerpo de Aviación del Perú service

Latin American aviation specialist **AMARU TINCOPA** continues his occasional series on the history of military aviation in Peru with the story of the 12 French Nieuport-Delage NiD 121C1s operated by the *Cuerpo de Aviación del Perú* during 1934–39 — a short career for what proved to be a rather undistinguished parasol-wing monoplane fighter

FRANCE'S CHASSE 1 (C1 — Fighter 1) Specification of 1930 called for a state-of-the-art single-seat fighter for the *Armée de l'Air* (AdA — French Air Force), to be powered by a 650 h.p. engine and capable of a minimum top speed of 350km/h (217 m.p.h.) at 4,000m (13,100ft) and an operational service ceiling of 9,000m (29,500ft). Accordingly, the Nieuport-Astra company (to become the Nieuport-Delage Co in the 1930s) began studies for a new light fighter in compliance with those parameters. In 1931 the result, the Nieuport-Delage 120-series, was submitted for consideration, along with 27 other designs offered by several French manufacturers.

The NiD 120C1 base design was a parasol-wing monoplane of all-metal construction. The

fuselage comprised a metal structure covered with duralumin panels, with the wing, supported by a Y-type strut, incorporating a cutout above the cockpit to allow the pilot to raise the seat so that his head protruded just above the wing. Another distinctive feature of the type was the engine-cooling system, incorporating radiators built into the wing, with the air sucked in through slots in the leading edges and expelled through the trailing edges after circulation. Other innovative features of the NiD 120-series included the installation of a CO₂ fire-suppression system, a complete radio transmitter/receiver suite and a pneumatic brake system for the mainwheels of the fixed undercarriage.

Two prototypes were produced: the NiD 121C1, powered by a 650 h.p. liquid-cooled V12 Lorraine

BELOW The Hispano-Suiza 12Xbrs-powered Nieuport-Delage NiD 122C1 at the Centre d'Essais de Matériels Aériens at Vélizy-Villacoublay in July 1932. The Nieuport-Astra company was renamed Nieuport-Delage in the 1930s in honour of Gustave Delage, the company's chief designer and manager during the First World War.

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ABOVE The NiD 121C1 prototype, powered by a 650 h.p. Lorraine 12Hars Pétrél engine, shows off its classic 1930s lines during a photographic sortie. Note the cutout in the centre section of the parasol wing, which provided the pilot with a good field of vision in all directions; also the radiator slots incorporated into the wings' leading edges.

12Hars Pétrél engine, and the NiD 122C1, fitted with the similar but more reliable Hispano-Suiza 12Xbrs V12 engine of the same power. The latter was the first of the two prototypes to fly, on July 23, 1932, in the hands of test pilot Joseph Sadi-Lecoq. The NiD 121C1 made its maiden flight on November 25, 1932. Unfortunately, the 122C1 prototype was destroyed in an accident on April 13, 1933. The aircraft was performing a low-level pass in front of members of the French Parliament when it lost a wing section owing to severe vibration, crashing and killing its pilot. Testing, however, continued with a second 122C1 prototype, which flew for the first time in July 1933. The results of the tests of the prototypes were promising, with the NiD 121C1 reaching an impressive top speed of 367km/h (228 m.p.h.).

The AdA, however, selected the Dewoitine D.500 as the winner of the competition, discarding the Nieuport-Delage design owing to its weak undercarriage, perceived vulnerability of the radiator to combat damage and poor stability at high angles of attack. In order to compensate the company for its development expenses, the French government authorised Nieuport-Delage to offer the type for the export market.

Meanwhile, in Peru ...

At the same time, the *Cuerpo de Aviación del Perú* (Peruvian Aviation Corps – CAP) was embarking on a modernisation process aimed at countering the numerical advantage of the *Aviación Militar de Colombia* (Colombian Military Aviation) during the so-called “Putumayo Conflict” — the unofficial war between the two countries for the control of a large land section between the

Caquetá and the Putumayo rivers in the Amazon forest during 1932–33. Colombia had achieved this numerical superiority thanks to a large — and early — modernisation programme of its own, established shortly after the beginning of the hostilities with Peru. The Peruvian government, initially confident of a quick victory over the then-underarmed Colombians, tried to counter the latter's response, but lack of political cohesion led to precious weeks wasted on political debates before Congress could authorise the foreign debt required to bolster the nation's military.

Once the funds became available, the Peruvian government sent Purchasing Commissions overseas, one being despatched to France after the Peruvian *Ministerio de Guerra* (MG — War Ministry) had been contacted by Paul Dietrich, representative of the French *Société Générale Aéronautique*, a consortium incorporating manufacturers including Hanriot, CAMS, Nieuport-Delage, Lorraine and Amiot. Once in France, the Peruvian Commission visited the Potez, Nieuport-Delage, Morane-Saulnier and Hanriot factories for the evaluation of various types.

In early March 1933, during a visit to the Nieuport *Centre d'Essais de Matériels Aériens* (Aeronautical Research & Test Centre) at Vélizy-Villacoublay, south-west of Paris, the Peruvian delegation was shown the NiD 121C1 prototype, the aircraft being offered as a fast, modern fighter capable of outrunning and outclimbing the USA's Curtiss Hawk II biplane, Colombia's main frontline fighter at the time. With few options available, and despite the machine still being under development, the CAP representatives reached a pre-agreement with the manufacturer