

## The Neuchâtel pilot Gérard de Chambrier is back

A few days ago, the Neuchâtel pilot Gérard de Chambrier returned from Greece. The statements he made to us on his return do not contradict the information we published last winter.

What is new are the explanations that the pilot was able to give after leaving his captivity on the final attitude of the Greek authorities. On intervention of the federal political department and the Swiss legation in Athens, M. de Chambrier was indeed released without being obliged to pay the very heavy fine of 800 million drachmas - approximately 250,000 fr. Swiss - to which he had been sentenced. As one is prohibited from leaving a Greek prison without having paid his debts (fine or taxes), this measure is equivalent in sum to a late dismissal. M. de Chambrier was not expelled from Greece, but released after ten-and-a-half months of detention: he could, without any concern, return to Greece.

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Let us recall the argument [*thèse*] that M. de Chambrier has always defended, that a technical incident had forced, on October 16, 1948, a landing on the island of Leucades [*Lefkada*]. He was piloting an airplane belonging to the company "Efisa S. A.," from Geneva, and was going on behalf of this company to Athens with a cargo of watches, lighters, and gold. His role was limited to ensuring the delivery of this cargo—whose Geneva shippers had regularly fulfilled their customs obligations—to an importer whom he had every reason to believe would provide [*au bénéfice*] an import permit.

After his forced landing, he freely declared the goods he had on board the plane to the customs officers of the island. A document giving the details of the goods, the "manifest," which, although regulatory and compulsory was in fact never required at that time for private planes, was missing from the pilot's papers. This is why the aircraft was seized. Mr. de Chambrier waited for three weeks for the result of the investigation that ensued.

He spontaneously declared the goods he had on board the plane to the customs officers of the island, after his forced landing. A document giving the details of the goods, the "manifest" which, although regulatory and compulsory was in fact never required at that time for private planes, was missing from the pilot's papers. This is why the aircraft was seized. Mr. de Chambrier waited for three weeks for the result of the investigation that had been opened.

Then he was arrested. The seizure of the Swiss aircraft had been announced in the Athens newspapers. On hearing the news, the recipient of the shipment, an American, fled and suddenly disappeared. A search of his house revealed that the importer in question was engaged in smuggling. And Mr. de Chambrier states that this is how he himself learned that he had transported goods for which payment was made outside the contract [*clearing*].

He explained that he himself had been hired as a transporter; although he protested his good faith, he was sentenced to eight and a half months and thirteen months in prison, successively. Then, after a judgment on appeal which reduced one of the sentences, the two decisions were combined, and the total duration of the detention was reduced to ten months.

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All of this is disturbing. Mr. de Chambrier is convinced that Greek customs, fond of high fines, looked for a victim and used him as a veritable hostage.

One final point: the Transair company, of which Mr. Gérard de Chambrier is co-director, is unfamiliar with this affair and was clearly never informed about it, despite all that has been said.