

A UNIQUE SECTION OF WW1 GERMAN 5 COLOUR NIGHT LOZENGE FABRIC FROM THE RUDDER OF A GOTHA Va ALMOST CERTAINLY OF BOGHOL 3-ENGLANDGESCHWADER CIRCA MAY – JUNE 1918

A unique 79cm x 67cm example section of five colour night lozenge fabric, which due to size and rib spacing is almost certainly from the right rudder of Gotha Va circa mid 1918.



IDENTIFICATION

Size wise, the cross is far too small a fuselage and rib tapes positions discount this anyway. Both these factors make a rudder the only possibility. Since night lozenge was only used on a few types of bombers, the possibilities are narrowed again. Checking plans of likely types; AEG's, Friedrichshafen's and other models of Gotha's, standard single rudders can be discounted, they are too large. That leaves us with types with twin rudders and all these types used operationally and/or experimented with twin rudders. Many of these types were prototypes and plans or even good pictures can not be found to compare. However, this section has a bullet or shrapnel hole which has been patched up, so we know the aircraft was an operational type.

Bar the size, the main factor to identifying what aircraft type this came from is the spacing between the rudders ribs/spars, with two attachment tapes measuring 22cm apart at their centres. Measuring down from these two tapes, the distance is far greater; 29.5cm, meaning

the next tape on the rudder must have been at the very least, just over this distance. This is quite distinctive and matches up to photos and plans of the twin rudders of a Gotha Va/b.



The only issue to identification is the distance from the upper tape to the top of the section of fabric. This is 3 -5 cm greater than in recently drawn plans. At the top of this section of fabric is a seam, where it was joined to second sheet of fabric and was wrapped around the upper frame at some point higher up. Unlike the reverse of the tapes, there is no sewn on signs of attachment to the frame bar some signs of glue on the obverse round about the seam and at the extreme edge of the reverse. This glue may be the start of the attachment to the upper frame started or the upper portion itself may have been wrapped around the frame, with an

edge reinforcement tape having been removed (and glue signs where it was) but I cannot be 100% sure.

Thus the distance from the upper tape to the top of the section of fabric must have been a minimum of 25cm if it was indeed wrapped over at the seam or 27.5cm if not. However recent plans are based on photos and are incorrect as they show a shorter distance between the top rip tape and the distance between the two tapes. Photos of the tail section of Gotha GV a 723/17, brought down in France in July 1918, clearly show the plans are incorrect as do others. Photos of the Gotha G Va prototype show the distance to be a great deal larger. Therefore it's safe to assume that Gotha GV a/b rudders are taller than in recent plans.

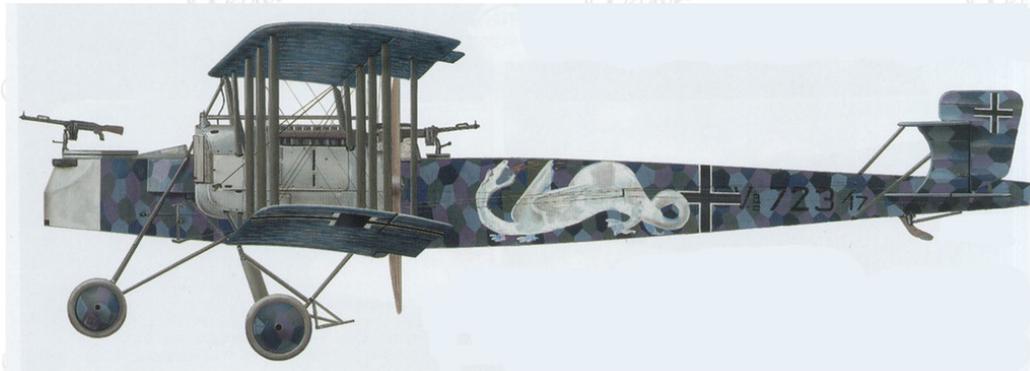


THE CROSS

This cross is very unusual in that the horizontal arms have been shortened by just under 6cm by being painted over black. The fabric has been cut off the rudder short at the right side of the horizontal, however enough black paint can be seen to show that this side was also blacked off at the end. A photo on page 45 (pic 63) of Albatros Productions 'Gotha', Gotha GVa 723/17 and possibly the Gotha next to it in the rear of the photo, appear to have these shortened crosses. The cross measures 59cm at the vertical, 47.t at the horizontal (not including the blacked off area). The style of cross on the Gotha can be narrowed down to an order made on 13th May 1918 ordering aircraft crosses to be changed to Latin types, with the horizontal arms shortened. However in early June, the cross style was changed back to the Balkan type.

This narrows down what type this cross was from. Since the cross was clearly over painted to shorten it, the aircraft must have been derived to its unit prior to the May 13th order (or soon after). This means it can't have been a Gotha Vb, as they didn't arrive until August 1918, so it must be a Gotha Va.

Only 25 Gotha Va's were built, serials 700-724/17, all arriving at the front between April and May 1918, which is a perfect fit. All but one which crashed prior to delivery, ended up at Boghol 3 (the Englandgeschwader). Since the cross shape wasn't changed back to the Balkan cross, we can assume it was shot down at some time between late May and perhaps mid July 1918. If copies of the war diary can be checked, it may well be able to narrow down again. It may even be from the 723/17 as the picture Albatros Productions 'Gotha' show this machine with the Latin cross as does the photo of the fuselage cross on the crashed aircraft. However it doesn't look like the cross has been 'field' shortened on the fuselage but painted as a Latin cross, so unless the tail section crosses had been incorrectly applied, this section offered is probably from an earlier delivered Gotha in the series with serials 700-724/17.

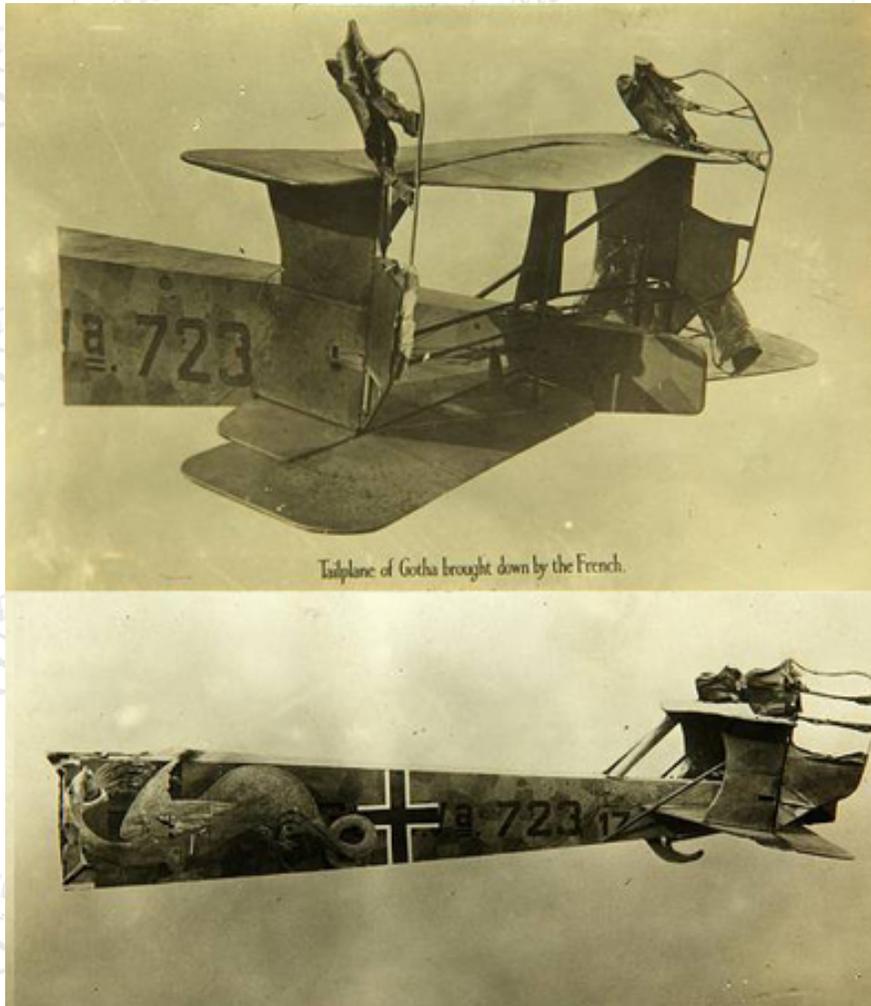


A PROFILE OF A GOTHA GVa 723/17 THOUGH BOTH FUSELAGE AND TAIL CROSSES ARE INCORRECT

REGARDING THE LOZENGE FABRIC ITSELF

Comparing the obverse on reverse of the lozenge fabric itself with original fabric taken from the only surviving WW1 German bomber, AEG GIV 574/18 in the Canadian Aviation Museum, its very similar. However this fabric appears to be slightly darker in tone than the AEG type and was probably particular to the type used by Gotha. The obverse of the fabric is darkly tinted dope, making the lozenge vary faint, indeed fainter than the fabric from AEG GIV 574/18. However areas around the edges where the dope has come off shows the colours of the fabric underneath. The reverse of the fabric still has sections of the same type of

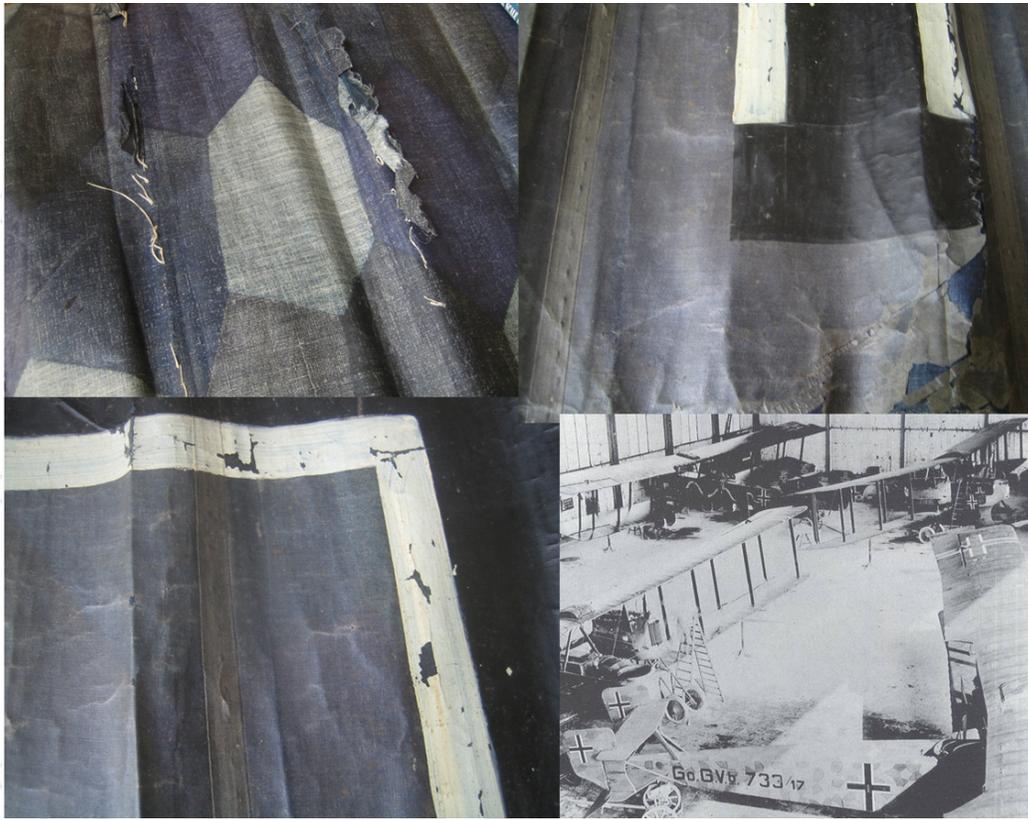
lozenge fabric that was wrapped around the framing spars themselves and sewn to the covering to fix it in place.



GOTHA GVa 723/17

CONDITION

The condition of the fabric is excellent with very little flaking to the paint and the fabric is still relatively supple. On obtaining this piece, along with two other sections of fabric from a different aircraft (not Lozenge), they were rolled up and have clearly been like this for many years. Indeed a previous owner scribbled a few notes on a sheet of paper (dated March 1985), trying identify what these pieces of fabric were. He notes they were wrapped in paper sent to a family in 1940. There is no information regarding where these pieces came from but they are very much 'out of the woodwork' and it seems likely these were the only owners. I have unrolled the fabric and placed in a temporary lightweight frame. However it clearly needs to be professionally mounted.



A quite amazing section of fabric and the only known section of rudder from a late war Gotha Va, which answers many questions up until now debated. Certainly the Albatros Productions 'Gotha', indicates only a couple of photographs of these aircraft are known and even known lozenge fabric samples seem to be from earlier types.