

## Le Point

# Collision in the Alps: the flight plan in question

An accident between an Italian helicopter and a French single-engine plane killed 7 people near Mont Blanc on Friday. The investigation is underway.

By *Thierry Vigoureux in Megève*

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The accident took place on Friday around 3 p.m. in the Italian Alps, not far from Mont-Blanc, above the Ruitor glacier, at an altitude of about 2,500 meters, in the valley of La Thuile. This dramatic collision occurred in uncontrolled airspace. Indeed, the whole territory is not covered by radars, especially when the planes fly low enough (however, at more than 500 feet or at least 150 meters in height), which was the case above the glacier from Ruitor. No Italian, French or Swiss speed camera can pick up and follow the echo of an airplane.

In addition, radio waves do not propagate in this rugged terrain and cannot relay information and authorizations from air traffic controllers to pilots. All aircraft all fly according to the rules of visual flight, namely "see and avoid". With priority on the right, the non-priority aircraft departs to avoid the collision. And the one who is higher must let the one who is lower pass.

### Circular flights

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In this context, would a flight plan have been useful? Italian justice immediately pointed to this purely administrative irregularity after the collision on Friday and placed in custody the surviving French instructor, who left Megève. To fly over foreign territory, even without landing there, a pilot must file a flight plan. Once sent by phone, email or fax, what happens to this message? No air traffic organization in this Franco-Italian-Swiss zone is actually designated to then answer a radio call. No frequency is dedicated to this function. In most cases, when the flight plan is actually activated, the aircraft has already completed its flight ...

Also, for almost half a century, pilots from the three countries concerned have developed the habit of not submitting a flight plan for circular flights over the massifs with return to the starting point nonstop, if this is possibly a few minutes on a glacier of a foreign territory. The three civil aviation authorities, fully aware of the situation, close their eyes, knowing that the flight plan would not contribute to flight safety in the Alps. Without being non-existent, collisions are very rare and theft incidents, few.

### **No black box**

On the other hand, the pilots who fly in these zones practice self-information, which consists in announcing on the mountain frequency 130.0 MHz its position and its intentions. Thus, arriving over a glacier, a pilot declares on the radio first "reconnaissance" then the different stages of his circuit before landing. The devices in the area are therefore informed and can communicate in the event of a conflicting trajectory. But, in the absence of a flight recorder on the plane as on the helicopter, the investigators will probably not be able to listen to the conversations again, unless a radio amateur from Valle d'Aosta has captured them.

The Italian helicopter, operated by GMH, was based in Courmayeur, in Valle d'Aosta. One of the specialties of this company is heliskiing. This practice of depositing skiers in the high mountains is authorized in Italy , but prohibited in France . Also, to stay within the law, skiers can embark below the Petit Saint-Bernard pass, from a helipad on the Italian side. After a few minutes of flight, the drop off took place on the head of the Ruitor, in Italy, at more than 3,400 meters. The off-piste descent to Sainte-Foy-de-Tarentaise, in France, requires the services of a high mountain guide.

### **GPS chip**

The reconstruction of the trajectories of the two aircraft will not be possible, for lack of a black box, not compulsory on light aircraft. No air navigation radar covers the mountain over the mountains. However, it is not excluded that the investigators will find information in the smartphones of the passengers of the helicopter and the plane. If the GPS chip is active, the positions are saved, and may even be

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automatically stored on Google . It remains to recover these phones. Today it is snowing in Valle d'Aosta. It is likely that rescuers and investigators will not have access to the accident site for several days.

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## 8 COMMENTAIRES

Par aviateur&marin le 23/10/2019 à 12:42

### **Collisions, abordages...**

C'est forcément le risque encouru en vol à vue : même si un radar civil (transpondeur) ou militaire (écho de peau) détectait un risque de conflit, le contrôle aérien ne pourrait donner de consignes d'évitement, les pilotes concernés n'écoutant très probablement pas la, les fréquences, utilisées en vol aux instruments...

D'ailleurs, même des avions de combat, équipés de radars air / air se percutent, quelque fois, hélas...

Voir, être vu, éviter, des capacités, activités humaines, faillibles comme toutes les autres...

Par egegarum le 02/02/2019 à 02:29

### **Hola !**

2500 M où 150 M pour les radars, de qui se moque t'on, big brother n'existe pas, pour nos petits vols.

Dans ces zones c'est du vol à vue.

Plan de vol, pour un aéroport, qui en fait un ?

pour finir, 7 morts sur les routes françaises le WKend dernier. Et personne en parle.

S. O. S aéoclubs en détresse.

Bye.

Par MC33 le 28/01/2019 à 08:46

### **Irrégularité administrative**

As said, and explained, well, this article, the filing of a flight plan would have responded to an injunction without any practical significance or utility.

Paper scrappers hating the absence of coercion and punishment (when there are rules of use), like the judges, rules without usefulness have been imposed.

The paper scraper has a clear conscience, and the judges apply the rules, the subject is not whether they are used for something.

And a survivor, who surely does not risk fleeing, is in police custody.

The paperwork morality is saved.

