THE ELABORATION OF A NEW FAMILY OF HELICOPTER BLADE PROFILES

J.-J. Thibert

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In 1974, ONERA undertook the design of a new airfoil family of rotor blades suited to the specifications of Aerospatiale. Three airfoils with a thickness to chord ratio of 12, 9 and 7% have been designed and tested in a wind tunnel. Their performances, better than those of other airfoils commonly used on helicopters, led Aerospatiale to use these airfoils in a new tapered blade-wind tunnel and inflight tests, confirming the expected gains. This new blade allowed better performances for the Dauphin series and helped the SA 365N to become the fastest machine in its class.
The Elaboration of a New Family of Helicopter Blade Profiles

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The blade profiles used in the majority of modern operational helicopters were first elaborated in the 1930's. This basically stems from the fact that while aerodynamics has always had an important place in airplane design, the same cannot be said for helicopters. As a matter of fact, from the end of the Second World War, which marked the start of the industry, until the end of the 1960's, improvements in performance were mostly due to mechanical advances, especially to the use of turbine engines.

In the last decade, meanwhile, major efforts have been made by all builders to improve the aerodynamics of their machines so as to better their speed, fuel consumption, and load-carrying characteristics. As far as the main rotor is concerned, the use of composite materials has made possible the introduction of tapered blades and also has allowed helicopter rotors to benefit from the recent progress in airplane wing profiles.

Within this framework, ONERA, with the support of DRET, undertook in 1974 the elaboration of helicopter blade profiles that would meet the specifications established by Aérospatiale. The ultimate objective was to develop complete blades that performed *Numbers in the margin indicate pagination in the foreign text.*
better than conventional ones.

**History of Profiles Used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1907-1930</th>
<th>THIN PROFILES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1930-1943</td>
<td>GOETTINGEN OR NACA PROFILES</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950-1960</td>
<td>LAMINAR PROFILES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1970</td>
<td>NACA PROFILES OR DERIVATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>ELABORATION OF PROFILES ADAPTED TO HELICOPTERS</td>
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<td>![Diagram of Helicopter Profiles]</td>
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<table>
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<th>Profiles Used in French Helicopters</th>
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<td></td>
<td>![Diagram of Profiles Used in French Helicopters]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

An examination of the profiles used in helicopter blades (figure 1) shows the same evolution took place (with a certain time lag) as in airplanes. Thus, the blades on the first machines had thin profiles. Then, between 1930 and 1945, the profiles came from the famous Gottingen and NACA series (G-770, NACA 0012,
NACA 23012, NACA 23015 ...). During the 1950's, laminar profiles were extended to helicopters with the introduction of the series 6 (NACA 63A012-63A015) and of the laminar series with a low $C_{m_o}$ especially designed for helicopters (9H12). However, the performances obtained were inferior to predictions and in the sixties one witnessed a return to the conventional NACA profiles and their derivatives. It should also be stressed that during this entire period, metal blades had the same profile no matter what their span.

Figure 2 shows that the NACA 0012 profile has been widely used on French helicopters. Only recent aircraft such as the SA 330 J version of the "Puma" and the bimotor models of the "Dauphin", the SX 365 N and the SA 366 G, are equipped with tapered blades whose profiles differ from the NACA ones. The AS 355, the biturbine version of the "Ecureuil", was given blades of modern profile, but they have a constant breadth for economic reasons.

Specifications for Helicopter Blade Profiles

The recent evolution toward tapered blades is explained easily by examining the calculated isoMach and isoincidence lines on the rotor disk. A simplified example of these lines is presented in figure 3. The compounding of the speeds of rotation and of advance engenders Mach numbers varying from 0.2 at the root to 0.85 at the blade tip for an advancing blade (azimuth varying from 0° to 180°). On the retreating blade (azimuth varying from 180° to 360°), the Mach numbers are much lower and range from 0.4 at the blade tip to 0, or even negative values (profiles attacked at the following edge)
Figure 3  
Example of Calculated Isoincidence and IsoMach Lines on a Rotor Disk

Key:  
a) Local Incidences  
b) IsoMach Lines  
c) Circle of Inversion

in the circle of inversion near the hub.

Because of this, it is necessary that the amount of lift $C_z$ and, consequently, the angle of incidence be low for the advancing blade and high for the retreating blade to keep the aircraft from rolling.

In the course of a single rotation, the blades therefore alternately undergo low incidences and elevated speeds and then high incidences and moderate speeds. Since the Mach and incidence levels encountered by the profiles are a function of their position on the blade,
optimization of rotor performance leads to the use of tapered blades.

The principal spheres in which the profiles function is therefore:

-- High Mach-low $C_z$
-- Low Mach-high $C_z$.

There is a third area to remember when considering an aircraft's stationary flight. The Mach number is then independent of azimuth and, consequently, of $C_z$, with only a relative variation in speed with radial distance (Mach = 0.6, $C_z = 0.6$). Taking account of this analysis of profile operating conditions, a set of specifications for sections at different radial distances can be established in the form of desired performances as a function of the main types of flight:

-- Forward flight
-- Stationary flight
-- Maneuvers

Helicopter blades were divided into three parts based on the increase in Mach number with increasing radial distance:

$$r/R < 0.8, 0.8 < r/R < 0.9, 0.9 < r/R$$

Figure 4 presents the specifications established for each region by Aérospatiale. Emphasis was placed on improving performance in relation to blades with conventional NACA 0012 profiles, in stationary flight by raising the lift/drag ratio at $M_0 = 0.6$ and $C_z = 0.6$ and
and in forward flight by increasing the drag divergence Mach number $M_{dX}$, but also $C_Z$ max in order to avoid retreating blade stall.

It should be noted that the performance requested is clearly superior to that of NACA 0012. For example, the $M_{dX}$ of this profile at $C_Z = 0$ is 0.79 and its $C_Z$ max at $M_0 = 0.4$ is 1. An extremely severe constraint is also imposed on the pitching moment coefficient at zero lift, $C_{m_0}$, which has to remain very low so as to limit the stress on the cyclic-pitch control rods.

The various conditions imposed on performance leads one to choose a thick profile for the inner blade region (elevated $C_Z$ max) and thin profile for the tip (elevated drag divergence Mach number).

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**Table:** Specifications for Helicopter Blades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flight Conditions</th>
<th>Preponderant Aerodynamic Coefficient</th>
<th>SECTION 1</th>
<th>SECTION 2</th>
<th>SECTION 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forward Flight</td>
<td>$M_{dX}$ at $C_Z = 0$ ≥</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>C_{m_0}</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationary Flight</td>
<td>$l/D.$ at $M_0 = 0.5-0.8$</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maneuvers</td>
<td>$C_{z_{max}}$ at $M_0 = 0.4$</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$C_{z_{max}}$ at $M_0 = 0.5$</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added Constraint</td>
<td>$\delta_C$</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4**

Specifications for Helicopter Blades
Profile Elaboration Method

ONERA undertook the elaboration of profiles corresponding to the set of specifications. It started with section 2, situated at a distance equal to about 85% of the total blade length and for which the relative thickness should be 9%. The resulting profile, named OA 209, has already been presented in a preceding article (no. 70, 1978-3). Recall simply that it was elaborated by choosing the desired distribution of speeds at $C_Z = 0$ and that its configuration was calculated with the aid of an inverse method of calculation. This technique, which is widely used for airplane airfoils, is still only rarely used for helicopters. Its advantages are however considerable since it allows:

--- A direct determination of excessive intrados and extrados speed and, consequently, of drag.

--- A direct determination of $C_{mO}$.

The profile's overall performance, as derived from tests carried out in ONERA's Modane S3 wind tunnel, are presented in figure 5 in terms of $C_Z$ max for $M_O < 0.5$, $Mdx$ at constant $C_Z$ for $M_O > 0.5$, and $C_{mO}$.

The objectives spelled out in the specifications were attained for $Mdx$ at $C_Z = 0$, which is 0.85, and for $C_{mO}$, which is extremely low even at high Mach numbers. Concerning stationary flight, the lift/drag ratio measured in the wind tunnel at $M_O = 0.6$ and $C_Z = 0.6$ was 75. The $C_Z$ max for maneuvers were 1.27 at $M_O = 0.3$ and 1.21 at $M_O = 0.4$. These values are slightly lower than the objectives,
but high for a profile with a 9% relative thickness.

The gains over the NACA profile are considerable in every aspect:

\[ \Delta C_Z = 0.14 \text{ at } M_O = 0.3 \ (11\%) \]
\[ \Delta C_Z = 0.21 \text{ at } M_O = 0.4 \ (21\%) \]
\[ \Delta M_d = 0.06 \text{ at } C_Z = 0 \]
\[ \Delta L/D = 15 \text{ at } M_O = 0.6 \text{ and } C_Z = 0.6 \ (25\%) \]

Since OA 209 embodied a reasonable compromise, the profiles for the root and tip sections were geometrically derived from it.
The basic profile configuration represented by OA 209 was conserved in the tip profile OA 207 up to the primary structural member in order to maintain a good $C_Z$ max at low Mach numbers. The rear part was thinned out to obtain a profile of 7% relative thickness and a low $C_X$ and high $M_d$ at $C_Z = 0$.

The basic thickness relationship of OA 209 was retained for the root profile OA 212, but increased to 12%. In addition, a camber that allowed the desired $C_Z$ max to be attained while keeping $C_m$ low was sought.

Performance of the OA Profile Family

![Profiles](image)

Figure 6
Design of the OA Profile Family

Drawings of the three profiles, OA 212, OA 209, and OA 207, are presented in figure 6. Their overall performances were derived from tests carried out in the Modane S3 wind tunnel with a two-dimensional flow passing over mock-ups having a 210 mm chord. In figures 7 through 9, a comparison is made with the performance of the
NACA 0012 profile under the same conditions. The overall performance characteristics are:

- $C_z$ max for $M_o < 0.5$ and $M_{dX}$ at constant $C_z$ for $M_o > 0.5$

(figure 7)
-- Polar curves at $M_o = 0.5$ and 0.6 (figure 8)
-- Change in $C_x$ with Mach number at $C_z = 0$ and $C_z = 0.1$ (figure 9)

![Graph](image)

**Figure 9**
Change in Drag as a Function of Mach Number

There are considerable gains in $C_z$ max compared to the NACA 0012 profile. The OA 212 profile of the same relative thickness causes an increase in $C_z$ max of 32% at $M_o = 0.4$ and of 44% at $M_o = 0.5$. As for the drag divergence Mach number, the reduction in relative thickness, associated with thickness determining formulae
particularly adapted to transonic speeds, confers performances to the OA 209 and OA 207 profiles that are greatly superior to that of NACA 0012. The lift/drag ratios at $M_O = 0.5$ and 0.6 and $C_z > 0.5$ as well as the $C_x$'s at high Mach numbers are equally better, but the OA family's level of precrtical drag is slightly higher (figure 9). This arises from the fact that for these low $C_z$, cambered profiles, the transition of the boundary layer at the intrados takes place near the leading edge. For NACA 0012, it occurs at the level of impact at the tests' Reynolds number, and therefore further downwind. Aérospatiale built two four-bladed rotor mock-ups for the purpose of testing the profiles in operating conditions closer to those actually encountered by a helicopter. They were tested on the rotor testing stand in ONERA's Modane S1 wind tunnel. The 4 m diameter rotors had blades with a 140 mm chord. The first rotor had an OA 209 profile over its entire length. The second one had an OA 209 profile up to 0.8 R. It then thinned down to an OA 207 profile at the blade tip. The tests confirmed the expected gains in comparison with NACA 0012 blades. Notably, there was:

-- An increase in the figure of merit during stationary flight,
-- An increase in the lift/drag ratio during forward flight, particularly under heavy load.

Based on their performance, Aérospatiale decided to equip the SA 365 N and the SA 366 G versions of the Dauphin with blades using the OA family of profiles. The performance obtained during test flights of the SA 365 N confirmed the potential gains expected on the basis of the results of two-dimensional tests on rotor mock-ups.
Conclusion

These studies, which were carried out in close collaboration with Aérospatiale, have thus led to the design of a new, high-performance rotor. Our cooperation will, of course, continue in the field of blade profiles, where progress, perhaps not as spectacular but nonetheless significant, can still be realized. Cooperation will also continue in such largely unexplored areas as:

-- Blade plan form.
-- Hub drag,
-- Air intake efficiency,
-- Anti-torque rotors.

All this activity should permit an even greater improvement of helicopter performance in the near future.